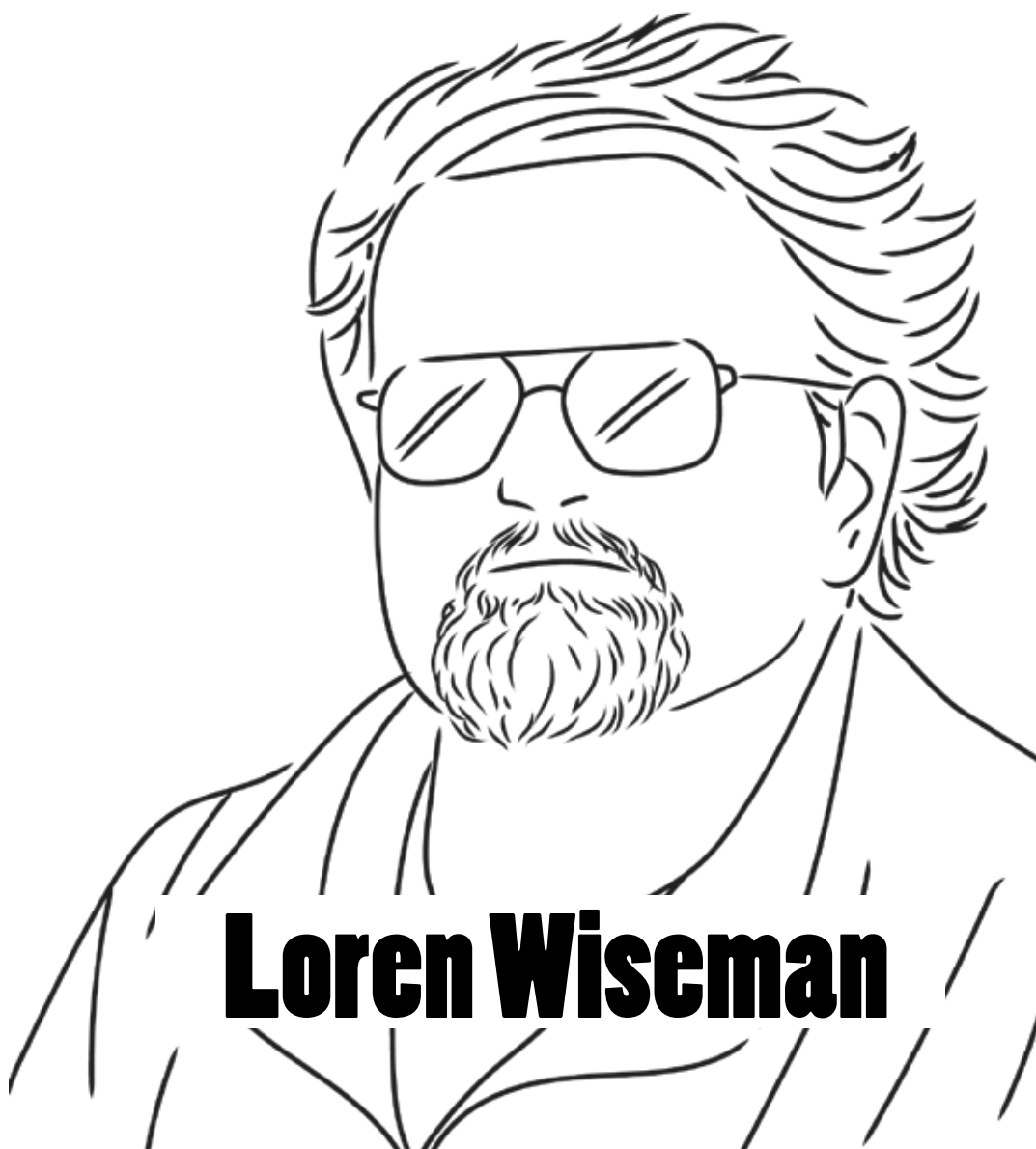# GROGNARD

Ruminations On 40 Years In Gaming

Loren Wiseman

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Loren Wiseman

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GROGNARD

Ruminations on 40 Years In Gaming
By Loren Wiseman

Loren Wiseman
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grognard (plural: grognards)

    1. An old soldier.

    2. (games, slang) Someone who enjoys playing older war-games or roleplaying games, or older versions of such games, when newer ones are available.

Defining *grognard* as *an old soldier* is like defining Hercules as a strong man: technically correct, but missing mountains of meaning. Let's try to find that meaning.

Napoleon rose from obscurity in Corsica to become Emperor of the French in a series of brilliant military campaigns, and all through them his most elite (and dependable) troops were the Old Guard, battle-proved veterans who had served him since the very beginnings. They were his personal bodyguard, and his tactical reserve. They literally saved his life more than once.

Those soldiers, brave, true veterans, were accorded a special privilege by their Emperor and commander: they were allowed to complain (where other soldiers were certainly not) about the petty troubles of military life; they were allowed to grumble. The Old Guard became know as the Grumblers, in French: *les Grognards*).

The oldest roots of the hobby of wargaming is miniatures, and a favorite period was the wars of Napoleon. Groups of friendly competitors would meet for a Saturday to line up their carefully painted soldiers and recreate the battles of the past (perhaps achieving a different outcome). These devoted players remained a relatively small community in the late 1950's and into the 60's.

The 1970's brought changes to the hobby: the rise of board wargames with die-cut cardstock counters replacing the carefully painted miniature soldiers, and printed gameboard maps replacing tables or floors strewn with realistic scenery. The newcomers to the hobby certainly enjoyed themselves and these new games, but the experienced veterans grumbled that these new recruits had no idea of the depths of the hobby or its roots.

These grumblers, steeped in military history, immediately saw a connection with Napoleon's Old Guard. They were the Old Guard and they grumbled about it; they called themselves *grognards*, and these new people didn't even know what they meant.

Grognard isn't just an old gamer, or one who prefers older games: it is a badge of honor, a label proudly worn by experienced gamers who have watched their gaming hobby grow from obscurity to mainstream.

Loren Wiseman was one of those *grognards*.

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Foreword

I first met Loren Wiseman sometime in the late '70s, at either a Gen Con or an Origins – the details are lost in the mists of memory. He was manning the GDW booth, talking to fans and hawking games. I took to him instantly. A big friendly bear of a guy, with an erudite manner and a load of good stories, who had designed **Eagles** and was one of the key figures in **Traveller** (which I was playing at the time) . . . of course I liked him. It was just a shame that Bloomington was so far from Austin, and we only ran into each other at conventions.

Time passed. More conventions happened. E-mail became a thing (no, it hasn't always been around). I got to talk more with Loren. I still enjoyed his stories! And I enjoyed reading his Traveller magazine, the Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society. It was simple, direct, intelligent, and useful, with very little fluff and lots of contributions from talented creators.

Eventually, GDW came to the end of its run. Loren was at loose ends, and **SJ Games** hired him to helm the **GURPS Traveller** project and continue JTAS as an online zine. And that project had a good long run and produced a lot of things that I'm very proud of, and it would not have happened without Loren.

And outside of **Traveller**, it was just plain fun having Loren around. He was an unstoppable raconteur, a keen playtester, and a deadly opponent at Munchkin. He made a lot of good friends at our office, and he's badly missed.

Loren was a multi-talented man, a writer and historian and storyteller and painter of minis and gamer for every type of games that you can imagine, set in the past, present, and future. But perhaps his greatest talent was as an editor, recruiting and managing writers for the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society**. Through the decades, he kept the magazine relevant, readable, and fun. And his own contribution to every issue was the editorial. I always read that first, and I would have read it first even if it had been at the back of the magazine!

Loren was a great editor, a great writer, and a great friend. He liked history, and games, and people, and he liked the process of writing. The subject sometimes didn't matter as much as the sheer joy of telling a story, getting something down on paper. From the days when JTAS really was printed on paper, to the digital era, he kept going, kept telling stories.

I'm glad that his work is going to be preserved and enjoyed, so that the people who never got to meet him, who never got to read his work when it was new, will be able to enjoy the thing that Loren Wiseman did best of all.

Steve Jackson

Loren Wiseman was best known as the award-winning editor of the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society**. He edited the original **JTAS** from **GDW** from 1979 to 1985, and continued as editor (variously titled Managing Editor, Consulting Editor, or Contributing Editor) for **Challenge Magazine** through its final issue in 1995. When **Steve Jackson Games** produced the **GURPS** edition of **Traveller**, Loren became editor of the revived **JTAS Online** from its inception in 2000 though its final issue in 2015.

For **JTAS Online**, Loren decided to write an editorial for every issue: initially weekly, and later bi-weekly. His editorials were an eclectic undertaking. He wrote about his experiences as a game designer and developer in the early days of modern games: circa 1970 to 1990. He wrote about conventions, and gaming in general. He wrote about history: he was equally proficient in the modern and ancient eras, and everywhere in between.

He once commented: "Someone once write a history of modern gaming and shared it with me. I turned to the chapter on **Game Designers' Workshop** and found multiple indexed mentions of Frank Chadwick and Marc Miller, but no mention of myself. I guess I wasn't important enough."

This volume corrects that record with his own words.

2000

2000

Jan 28, 2000, Welcome to JTAS

Welcome to the first issue of the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society**! Our purpose here is to provide **Traveller** enthusiasts with the widest possible selection of useful material: short adventures, new starships, new minor races, news, views, reviews, and a myriad other things. We'll do our best to keep you informed about what's going on with the premiere science-fiction roleplaying game, and to let you know what's coming up as well as taking a retrospective look at the past. We'll interview **Traveller**'s movers and shakers, the writers, the artists, and the people behind-the- scenes. In addition, however, we'll be doing a few things that couldn't be done earlier—the web opens up so many possibilities. We have a few surprises in store for you.

JTAS will be available only by subscription, though for the first two weeks it will be free. A new "issue" will be posted each week. Each weekly update will include:

This column, which will not only be a forum for my random musings, but will also report on doings in the **Traveller** world . . . not just at **SJ Games**, but everywhere.

Three articles. The mix will vary from week to week . . . Amber Zones, deck plans, campaign settings, Casual Encounters, reviews, variants, interviews, short adventures, design notes and more. Readers will be able to rate the articles, so we'll soon find out what you like best, and we'll give you more of it.

The **Traveller** Poll. Sometimes it will be serious. Sometimes it won't.

The **Traveller** News Service. But note that this feature will still keep its free link from our **GURPS Traveller** pages, too. This is a service we're providing to the whole **Traveller** community, whether they choose to subscribe to **JTAS** or not.

Subscribers will also have access to several continuing features:

A complete archive—everything from previous issues will remain available. And we've started the archive with all the **Traveller**-related articles from the **Pyramid** online archive. It won't be long before this becomes a huge resource.

Brubek's, an area for live chat. It will be open 24/7, just like the hundreds of real B**rubek's** locations in better starports across charted space. From time to time we'll interview a special guest, but please drop in and meet your friends here any time you like.

Discussion areas where our readers can share their ideas about this magazine and everything else **Traveller.**

For those of you who don't know, I was the original editor of **GDW's Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** (in its print form way back in the early days of **Traveller**), and I jumped at the chance to return to the old harness. We decided, for obvious reasons, to use the old **JTAS** article classifications, and we hope that this new, online version of the Journal is as well-received as the old paper version was. I have devoted a sizable chunk of my life to Traveller, and I plan on continuing for a long, long time to come.

And now, some thoughts about science-fiction illustration:

The Look of the Future

One of the aspects of producing material about the future is that we are often called upon to illustrate it. Cover illustrations are especially important. The cover painting is normally the first thing a prospective buyer looks at, and many people judge game books by the quality of the cover painting and the interior illustrations. Products with boring art have less perceived value than those with interesting and exciting illos. One of the problems we encounter is getting illustrations that are at the same time good art (something that will draw the casual observer's attention), accurate to the game, and still a reasonable projection

of the future. This is not as easy as it sounds, as these goals are often mutually contradictory.

Suppose, for example, we need to show someone in the act of talking on a telephone. Up until recently, the illustration would have shown someone holding an object up to their head, either with their mouth open to indicate they were talking, or with their mouth closed indicating they were listening—maybe gesturing with the other hand as people often do when on the phone. The viewer could look at the illustration, and even if they didn't recognize the object in the subject's hand as a telephone, they could fill in the details. If the telephone was a hands-free headset, they could probably figure out what was supposed to be going on. But what if the telephone is nothing more than a small dot fastened to the skin of the speaker's Adam's apple? What if the phone is inside a pair of glasses, or completely inside the user's skin? Do you show someone sitting there talking to no one in particular? It gets worse: if the phone receives input direct from the user's brain, you can't even use the handy "mouth open = talking" shorthand. How does the viewer know what the art is showing? How does a person talking on the phone look any different from someone thinking about what to have for lunch?

Carry things a little farther and consider where most experts think computers are headed over the next few decades. If keyboards are replaced by voice (or thought) input, and screens are replaced by "heads-up" displays on the inside of a pair of glasses (or direct input to the optic centers of the brain), how would an artist illustrate the difference between:

A person reading (or writing) a novel.
A spy hacking into a computer database.
A person sitting in a reclining chair daydreaming/asleep.
An executive meeting with subordinates in a virtual conference room.
An assassin operating a remotely piloted stealth missile toward the Archduke's gig.
A person talking to his grandmother on the telephone.

I think most people agree that turning a scene like this into an exciting illustration presents a considerable challenge to the most talented artist—if they are required to be absolutely accurate to the real world (or whatever we think it will be in the future).

Another image for your consideration: I am often told the most efficient design for a contragravity armored fighting vehicle is (probably) an aerodynamic spheroid like an egg or a football/rugby ball. Such a vehicle would not need a turret for its main weapon, since it could simply point the whole vehicle at the target. Now imagine a painting showing these in action: a half dozen camouflaged Easter eggs flying around shooting at each other (and I certainly wouldn't buy any of the 25mm miniatures—b-o-r-i-n-g)!

What's the solution? Fairly obvious, I think: absolute accuracy must give way (at least a little) to excitement and visual interest, in other words—to artistic license.. When the starship fires its main weaponry in a movie, if all that happened was a couple of little red lights blinked on and off, the audience would consider themselves cheated. Artists (and directors) have been tinkering with the way reality is depicted in the name of entertainment for a long time. If you have ever heard a real world gunshot, you know that they don't sound anything like they usually do in the movies, and movie explosions are much more spectacular than their real-world counterparts. Real-world firearms usually don't spout the huge gouts of flame that they do in the comics (and I have never seen anybody leave little lines in the air, no matter how fast they can run). I have heard real-world surgeons nitpick on-screen operations, and real-world police criticize on-screen cop shows. Very few things work exactly as shown in the visual media, and the same thing applies to print media.

A good example of what I'm talking about can be found in the cover to **GURPS Traveller** Starports. The painting shows two people watching a cargo pod being loaded onto a

merchant vessel. The men are wearing coveralls that are not very futuristic. The two of them would not look out of place if they were on the tarmac at LAX. The pod is a contemporary cargo pod, for all practical purposes—I'm sure those of the future will still look utilitarian and more than a little worn. The spaceship is enough like an airplane to look familiar yet different enough to look futuristic. The flying forklift and the unusual look of the buildings in the background are the main visual keys that this is not just another day at the airport ca. A.D. 2000. All in all, the painting shows what we want it to show—a starport in action. It is colorful, pleasing to the observer, and has many interesting details that cause the eye to linger and enjoy. Does it depict a starport of the far future with complete accuracy? Certainly not, but that is not what is needed.

It is possible to take this to extremes, of course. Too much artistic license can destroy people's suspension of disbelief. Space fighters that bank and otherwise maneuver like atmospheric fighters are the most commonly mentioned offenders, closely followed by space explosions with sound waves. It's always a judgment call, and like most matters of judgment, it is subject to individual opinions.

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

P.S. It feels really good to sign off this way once again!—LKW

Feb 05, 2000, JTAS

As far as **Traveller** is concerned, the biggest news flash is what you are reading now—the new **Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society.** The formal announcement was made at 24:00 hours Central Time Wednesday [Feb 02, 2000] and quickly spread through the Internet and around the world. When I arrived at work Thursday morning, I found a huge accumulation of e-mail congratulations and best wishes, and several messages wanting to know how to convert a trial subscription into a paid one. I went to the office of our CFO, Kelly Singletary, and asked him if he could find out when the first paid subscription was entered. We looked in the database and discovered the card had cleared at 12:17 AM, which meant that someone had read the illuminator, jumped immediately to the **JTAS** site, liked what he saw and subscribed.

JTAS's reception has been overwhelmingly positive. I received several notes from readers who said they had subscribed immediately upon seeing that I would be editor (at least one subscriber said he had signed up instantly after reading my editorial, and only then did he read the other articles). I must admit to being very moved by the welcome **JTAS** has received so far.

This week, we have a few interesting things: First, a deck plan for a 100-ton rescue vessel, partly to do something different and partly to provide a little "teaser" for **Starports** (by John M. Ford with James Maliszewski), due out in March. Also, beginning this week, we are serializing **Arm of Decision**, a set of rules for company-level armored combat by David Pulver. Finally, **First In** author Jon Zeigler describes a few animals from the Regina subsector.

Traveller and Me

A popular discussion on the **Traveller Mailing List** in the last week or two has been for people to expound on why they started playing **Traveller** and why they have remained with it. Most of the TML notes were fond reminiscences of how the writer had discovered Traveller, and descriptions of early games followed by short (or in some cases, extremely

long) explanations of what attracted them to Traveller at first and why they are still playing and/or GMing. It was very interesting to see the common threads running through all of them, and to compare the various reactions. Often, fans of 20 years' experience and fans who discovered the game only months ago gave similar reasons. I've read all of the notes with interest, and I thought I'd chip in something of my own.

I have rather a unique slant on the subject: I started playing **Traveller** because it was my job.

When **GDW** was founded, roleplaying games did not exist—none had been published at that point. We started out publishing wargames because that was what we did as a hobby, and we turned it into an occupation. When **Dungeons & Dragons** came out, we played it intensively. Inspired by the potential of roleplaying, GDW published its first RPG (a single booklet called *En Garde!,* dealing with swashbuckling adventures and notable for not requiring a GM). Shortly afterward, Marc Miller proposed we publish a science fiction RPG—I forget whether he had the name at that time or not. All of us at **GDW** read SF, and **GDW** had published several games dealing with various science-fiction themes (most notably **Triplanetary**). Marc had sketched in some basic mechanics, Frank Chadwick added to these and we began playtesting the game. After a few sessions, we added more to the basic mechanics, and each of us created a "universe" for the others to adventure in.

My "universe" (quotes intentional) was inspired by several SF novels I had read over the years. It revolved around a single system in the middle of a heavily traveled trade route across a vast rift separating two empires (which seem rather petty as I look back on them—both combined had fewer than 300 star systems, and I never did get all of them generated) and a few small buffer states. I named the central world "**Starwell**" (after the Alexei Panshin novel **Star Well** from which I borrowed certain elements), and made it independent of both powers, intending it to be a kind of Casablanca where politics, trade, and military adventures could start and end. **Starwell** was a deep-space installation inspired by the writings of the L-5 society (the system had no habitable worlds). It was dependent on trade for its continued existence, but the same trade made it too valuable to risk in a direct invasion. Sadly, few adventures ever took place in **Starwell**'s universe, and I lost most of the details years ago in a move. Bits of it live on here and there as part of the Third Imperium, however, so all was not lost.

There are many reasons why I'm still with **Traveller** after all these years. It is a much more pleasant way to earn a living than digging ditches or retail sales (I've done both). It has enabled me to change a few people's lives—mostly for the better, I hope. I've been to places I would never have seen, done things I would never have done, and met people I would never have known were it not for **Traveller**—fans, gaming professionals, artists, writers, soldiers, actors, and scientists, to name a few. It has proven both inspiring and satisfying on a number of levels. If I have to put it in one sentence: My life is vastly better for my association with **Traveller**. What better reason can there be?

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 14, 2000, "A Rose, by Any Other Name"

This is the first paid issue of **JTAS.** Reaction to the previous issues has been very positive and the quantity of my daily e-mail has nearly doubled (mostly congratulatory messages, and an increasing number are article submissions). Those of you who are reading this are the ones who thought enough of our efforts to pay for a subscription—thank you. We will do our best to prove ourselves worthy of your confidence.

A while back, when I was checking the spelling to the world names for a **GURPS Traveller** product, the thought occurred to me that we could have saved ourselves a lot of trouble if we had named the worlds after places like Boston or Chicago or Albuquerque (well, maybe not Albuquerque—nobody can spell Albuquerque). Anyway, this week, I thought I'd take another short trip through the memory bank, and reminisce about some of the names used in **Traveller.**

First, **Traveller** itself. Marc chose the word because it summed up what the game was about—traveling among the stars. **Traveller** was the working title (all projects have working titles, which have a disturbing tendency to become final titles—but that's another editorial), and as far as I know, neither Marc nor any of the rest of us considered any serious alternative. **Traveller** is short, easy to remember, and evocative of all the positive images of the subject matter. We chose the British spelling (with two ells rather than one) because it made the title look unique. When done in all caps, it made the word a little longer, which made it fill out a headline better (although we ended up doing all the titles in caps/lower case).

I am not sure who named the major races. Marc was certainly involved, but Frank Chadwick and John Harshman may have had a hand. The aliens that were to become the major races first appeared in a prototype game with the working title "**Imperium**" (which was later used on another, different game as the real title). This game, which was playtested around the same time **Traveller** was being designed, involved a human empire surrounded by alien empires: the lion- like Aslan, the wolf-like Vargr, the Centaurs, and the Hive (along with a couple of humanoid groups)—this is beginning to sound familiar, I trust? The game never saw print, although we did use the map again . . .

The name Aslan was either taken from the Turkish word for lion or from the character in C. S. Lewis' **Chronicles of Narnia** novels. Marc himself can't remember, but since Lewis probably took the character's name from the Turkish, it all comes from the same root regardless.

Hive/Hiver came from the original notion that the race had a collective mind, although we dropped this notion early in their development. The original body was to be a large flightless avian, rather like a diatryma with arms, but Bill Keith and John Harshman convinced Marc to go with something even more alien.

Solomani was a variant on the Latin word "*Sol,*" which Marc used instead of "Terran" or "Earthling." K'kree was invented by Bill Keith when he and I collaborated on the Centaurs.

I do not remember the derivation of Vilani, Zhodani, and the others.

I have trouble understanding why people find this sort of thing so interesting, but I am happy to reminisce. I'll do some more in upcoming issues. Perhaps I'll delve into the subject of Remulak?

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 21, 2000, "Languages"

We made a change in the look of **JTAS** on Friday, and I would like to know what everyone thinks of it. We have received several comments from readers that the white-type-on-black background look of the old pages was difficult to read and hard to print out. I confess that I found it almost painful to look at (and my bifocals didn't help matters any—yes, I have bifocals, which makes me an official "old guy"). We have had a few comments on the discussion board already, but I'd like to know what everyone thinks. Please take the time to let us know what you think of the new look, either on the discussion board or by dropping us an e-mail.

I have never had a facility for languages. I took eight semester hours of German in college, and none of it remains after 20 years (except for a tendency to capitalize my nouns). When I was in Sweden a few years ago for a convention, I had an interesting linguistic encounter at the airport: A young Finnish woman was having trouble with the Swedish security guard's questions about luggage ("Is that your bag? Did you pack it yourself?" and so on). The guard spoke no Finnish, but spoke English with a Swedish accent. The Finn spoke no Swedish, but spoke English with a Finnish accent. Neither could understand the other, but I could understand both, and both could understand me. I found myself in the rather comical situation of translating from English to English, and back again.

Early in the publication of **Traveller**, the question of languages came up in a rather unusual way. Bill Keith (who defined the look and feel of **Traveller** in his artwork more than any other artist) had been assigned an illustration that required a sign as its focus. Bill asked a simple question: should he label the sign in English? We discussed the question and soon decided yes, he should use English. It was the only language we could count on all of our customers reading (parochial as we were in those days, we never dreamed of the international audience **Traveller** has today). We set about creating reasons why English became the formal language of the Imperium (renaming it Galanglic in the process to make it seem more SF). I won't go into these handwaves, because they are simply convenient justifications—I don't know of anyone who reasonably expects English (or any other language) to be around in its present form 3,000+ years from now. English, if it is around at all in 3,000 years, will probably be unrecognizable to a present-day speaker. There are people now who barely understand Elizabethan English, and that is not much more than 500 years past. The English of Chaucer is a couple of centuries older, and bordering on unintelligible. The English of the 10th and 11th centuries would probably sound more like Dutch to Americans of the present day.

I won't say that it is impossible for any language to remain unchanged for that long, however. Modern Polish is pretty much unchanged from medieval Polish, and Icelandic is said to be identical to the language spoken by Eric the Red (so I am told). I cannot speak with any authority about the differences between Latin and Italian, or classical Greek and modern Greek (although there are **Traveller** fans who can).

In the long run, language is one of those things left up to the discretion of the GM. Not everyone feels it worth the effort, but it can be fun to fool around with (indeed, there are people having a great deal of fun creating Vilani as you read this). It can present characters with all sorts of situations, from the mildly amusing (such as my encounter in Sweden) to the highly dangerous (I'm sure GMs need no prompting here).

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 28, 2000, A Traveller Reading List—sort of

First of all, in case you haven't heard, the first volume of the reprint edition of the Classic **Traveller** books is now available. This link will take you to Marc's information page for the first volume, which covers books 0 through 8 of the original game.

Second, we are seeking reviewers for pre-release copies of two upcoming BITS products, **101 Patrons** and **At Close Quarters**. Interested parties please contact me.

A **Traveller** Reading List—sort of . . .

Traveller fans may be interested in what science fiction I have read over the years, and what might have influenced me in writing the portions of the game I was responsible for.

As a child, I was a voracious reader, but I got off to a late start where science fiction was concerned: I think I was 10 before I read my first SF story. I don't remember what it was, but it was probably by Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, or Andre Norton (which doesn't narrow it down much, I'm afraid). This was in the early days after **Sputnik**, and my peers and I were encouraged to read science fiction in the hope that it would somehow enable the USA to catch up with the Soviet space program—or at least ready us for life in the high-tech future that was coming (you know—the one that starts in 1990?). Whatever the reason, the local library had an extensive collection of science fiction, with the occasional fantasy novel in the mix. I would go to the local library on a Saturday afternoon (it was a five-minute walk from my house if I dawdled), and often spend the entire day there. Often, I would finish a book and be left with a sense of sadness that the story was ended, and a longing to continue the adventure somehow.

For what it's worth, here is what I read, and what I think influenced my designs.

Isaac Asimov: First and foremost, **The Foundation Trilogy**: **Foundation, Foundation and Empire,** and **Second Foundation**. I have never read the later books that extended the trilogy, but I read these three over and over. Asimov said he took inspiration from the Roman Empire, which was an attraction to me, and his interstellar empire was galactic in scope (and makes the Third Imperium of **Traveller** seem rather small by comparison). Asimov wrote extensively on such a wide variety of subjects, it seems restrictive to label him a science fiction author, but that's where he started and that's what he always considered himself.

L. Sprague de Camp: Another author whose works have extended well beyond the bounds of science fiction, de Camp provided me with many, many hours of reading pleasure. **The Planet Krishna** stories did not influence **Traveller** directly, but they are well worth reading nonetheless.

Robert Heinlein: It's hard to give a short listing, but I'll hit some highlights: **The Rolling Stones, Starman Jones, Space Family Robinson,** and **The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress.** I particularly enjoyed **Fifth Column** and **The Puppet Masters** but I cannot think of any way they influenced my work in **Traveller.** I lost interest in his later books (**The Number of the Beast, Friday,** etc.), and I'm not sure why.

Larry Niven: Niven's **Known Space** books are fine reading. He has such a huge body of work, and has written on so many topics that it is hard to find a SF concept he hasn't dealt with.

Military SF: Jerry Pournelle (**The Falkenberg Books**), David Drake (**The Hammer's Slammers Books)**, and Joe Haldeman (**The Forever War**) pioneered SF dealing with military themes. My interest in military history drew me to these books—I am not alone here, I'm sure.

When **GDW** took out it's first **Traveller** advertisement in **Analog**, I got to write the

copy. I don't remember the precise wording, but I basically said that **Traveller** was for every science fiction reader who ever wanted to be a part of the story. That was certainly true for me way back when, and it seems to have struck a chord with others as well.

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Mar 06, 2000, You Think We Make this Stuff Up?

From time to time, one of our fans, in the process of interacting with the real world, stumbles across some bit of information in the game that has a basis in reality. Recently, several postings on the **JTAS** discussion board dealt with *tokay* (aka *tokaj*) wine. In the old **GDW** game **Azhanti High Lightning**, one of the scenarios involves recovering some rare wine bound for Emperor Strephon's table—a case of *tokaj eszencia*. We explain in the game that *tokaj* is a rare wine, and briefly discuss the details.

For those of you who don't read the message boards, I will summarize what was said (and bowdlerize a few details—oenophiles please excuse me): Tokay is a wine-growing region in Hungary, rather than a specific type of grape, and tokay refers to a group of white wines prepared in a rather special way. Some grapes are left on the vines a little later into the harvest season, and become infected with a specific type of mold (Botrytis cinerea. also known as the "noble rot"—those of you who are put off by the notion of mold in your wine probably shouldn't look at cheese too closely either) which causes a number of chemical changes to take place in the grapes—they shrivel and accumulate sugars until they are almost candied. In making tokay, these grapes (called *aszú* in Hungarian) are literally picked grape by grape, and converted into a thick paste that is added to a vat of wine from conventionally-harvested grapes. The number of baskets (called *puttunyos*—don't ask me how it is pronounced) added to a vat forms a rating of the sugar level of the wine, and ranges from 3 to 6 *puttunyos.* A label that says "*aszú 3 puttunyos*" is drier (less sweet) than a bottle labeled "*aszú 6 puttunyos.*" The wine is fermented and aged in oak barrels, sometimes in underground caves to provide constant temperature and humidity. *Tokay eszencia* (one of the preferred wines of the Austro-Hungarian emperors, and until the fall of communism reserved for high party officials), is prepared in a similar way, but I've sidetracked this discussion enough; check out any good wine encyclopedia for the details.

This is the kind of detail that **Traveller** fans love (as indicated by the reaction on the discussion board), and over the years I have gotten several comments relating to how surprised people were to discover that "petunia wine" really exists, and they can buy it*—they thought we had invented the details, if not the whole thing.

There are several unasked questions here: Why did we include tokay—why not just make up some exotic-sounding nonsense word to be the Emperor's favorite wine? For one thing, we probably wouldn't have invented the whole background about the noble rot and the differing number of baskets per vat—you can't make up stuff like that without it sounding contrived. Did we search through wine books looking for interesting vintages? No—we ran across it in the process of reading about something completely different, and marked it out as an interesting detail item. Later, when we needed scenarios, the tidbit about tokay came to mind, and we incorporated it into the game. It is all just a matter of reading about as many subjects as possible—history, science, technology, sociology—and keeping an eye out for interesting and potentially useful facts.

The world is a great, wide, wonderfully detailed place. There is ample material to add thousands of interesting bits to a game of **Traveller** (or anything else). Best of all, it is free for the taking, and your games will be the better for it.

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Inspired by this article, I did a quick Web search and (in a few minutes) found three sites dealing in wine that offered tokay/tokaj for sale—I ordered a couple of bottles of *aszú 6 puttunyos* from a Web dealer, and he is going to see if he can get any *eszencia* for me.

Mar 13, 2000, Memory Lane

For those of you who are interested, inspired by last week's editorial, I ordered two bottles of *Tokay Aszú 6 puttunyos* from a Web dealer. They arrived a week ago today, and I must now confess that they are gone! Several members of the **SJ Games** staff consumed them during our Wednesday movie night (Steve's widescreen TV and DVD player continue to hold an attraction for some of us). We watched **Stargate**, for those of you who are curious, and enjoyed the (slightly dated) special effects while we enjoyed the wine.

Which brings me to the topic of this week's editorial—**Star Wars.** I've reminisced about this before, but there are always fans who have never heard my rambling upon this topic, so here goes.

Back before the release of **Traveller** (when time was young and mastodons roamed the Earth), **GDW** had published it's first RPG, a single booklet called **En Garde,** and it was selling well enough for us to seriously think about doing more. Marc Miller proposed that we publish a game with a science-fiction theme (I forget whether he called it **Traveller** at that time or not—in any case, the name came very early in the development process). Design work commenced. At about the same time, rumors were circulating of an upcoming movie called **Star Wars**, but we knew nothing about it but the title.

About six months before the movie came out, I noticed a book called **Star Wars** by one George Lucas, whose name I vaguely remembered as having something to do with **American Graffiti** and **THX 1138** (and I wondered if it was the same person). I bought the book, and soon got a chance to read it—I drew jury duty. For those of you who have never experienced jury duty, basically you receive a small stipend from the county court to sit in a lounge in the county courthouse for eight hours a day. Reading material in the form of magazines and used paperbacks was thoughtfully provided by the county, but I decided to bring my own—my newly-purchased and still-unread copy of **Star Wars.**

I read the novel while waiting to be called (I eventually served on a jury in a rather boring land-condemnation case). I liked the novel—the plot was nice and the characters were interesting—but overall, it was nothing outstanding. Perhaps my mind's eye wasn't up to the challenge . . .

Design on **Traveller** proceeded, and playtesting began. The movie's premiere date approached, and we learned that it wasn't going to open everywhere at once. Marc invited me to accompany him to Lombard (a suburb of Chicago) to see the movie on its opening day. We took the afternoon off from work and made the three-hour drive, arriving in time to grab a short meal with Marc's mother before going to the theater. The theater had two screens (the other film was **Gone in 60 Seconds**—a forgettable flick with Ronnie Howard in one of his first post-"Opie" roles). A huge crowd had gathered. We learned that all six booths were selling **Star Wars** tickets, and if you wanted to see the other movie, the manager would sell you one out of a roll in his pocket. Marc and I bought our tickets and elbowed our way inside to await the next showing.

We were there for the third or fourth showing of the day, and the conversation around

us indicated that many people were still there after the first or second showings, waiting to see the movie again. Marc mentioned that this was a good sign. We entered the theater, took our seats, and sat through the coming attractions. The movie began, and as I watched the words scrolling up the screen, like the start of a bad serial, I remember thinking, "This is going to be very, very good or very, very bad!" The scrolling vanished into the distance, and the small ship appeared. My interest was piqued. The large ship appeared—and appeared— and continued to appear. It occurred to me that the small ship was in serious trouble . . . and that my concerns were groundless.

Those of you too young to have seen **Star Wars** in its initial release have little realization of the quantum leap in special effects that the movie represented. It changed everything about the way movies are made. It seems primitive now, 20 years later, but at the time it was a major advance in the state of the art. One example sticks in my mind—the scene where the **Millennium Falcon** makes the jump to hyperspace. The first time I saw this, I found myself on my feet, cheering—then I realized what I was doing, and looked around. I was in the middle of a theater full of people, all standing, all looking around sheepishly. Had we really just given a special effect a standing ovation?

I won't describe the rest of the movie, or the drive home afterwards or the conversations we had with the other staff the next day. Let's just say that for me, **Traveller** and **Star Wars** are irrevocably linked— the thought of one invariably calls up images of the other.

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Mar 20, 2000, Like Pulling Teeth

First off, I want to announce that gift subscriptions are now available for **JTAS**. If you know a **Traveller** fan (or if you are a **Traveller** fan) who is not a subscriber (or want something to add to your hint list), go here for full details.

Like Pulling Teeth . . .

I'm going to get to my topic this week by rather a roundabout route, so pay attention. Last week, I talked about Star Wars and how it changed the way movies are made (and marketed). Looking back at movies in general, I am reminded of another film that holds—or held—a fond place in my memories. When I was about 14, I saw a film called **The Long Ships**—Richard Widmark and Sydney Poitier in a movie about vikings and moors and a golden bell as tall as three tall men. (There was also a viking princess, a moorish noblewoman, and a harem—all of which held a certain fascination.) I loved it back then, and watched it every time it came on the late show (this was in the days before VCRs, when movies not in current release were relegated to be shown on television at random in the wee hours of the night for insomniacs and students who could sleep in study hall the next day). I came across it on the bargain page of a video place recently, and bought it for old times' sake. Then I watched it.

I was horrified—it was terrible. Clearly, my tastes have changed over the years—the plot is simple-minded, the acting mediocre at best, the special effects (model work and a few bluescreen shots) limited even for the time, the combat scenes silly, and the whole thing unbelievable. Although the film still has a certain campy charm, I am ashamed I once rated it as high as I did—some things just don't stand the test of time.

I feel the same when I look at some of the material I wrote 15 or 20 years ago. There are whole pages I'd like to bury (or at least get a chance to substantially rewrite)—I have learned so much since those days. When I was in high school, I wrote a novel (I started about a dozen, but this one I finished) and I never had the courage to send it anywhere. I ran

across it about 12 years later, and I was glad I never submitted it for publication, because if someone had submitted it to me, I would have rejected it. (Don't ask—the manuscript was lost years ago.) Which brings me, around **Robin Hood's** barn, to the way I write (I told you the route would be roundabout).

For years, I have read about authors with writer's block. I'd see articles on it, and I'd run my finger down the list of symptoms—zero inspiration, mounting panic and anxiety at the lack of inspiration, lack of any confidence in what you do manage to write—and it dawned on me that I am almost never un-blocked. For me, writing consists of pounding my head against the keyboard until a coherent document appears on the screen. Well, not literally, but more often than not, I find myself staring at a few hundred words on a screen for up to 20 or 30 minutes at a time and being unable to add a word to them. I envy my friends and acquaintances for whom the words flow like water over Niagara—- people who talk of writing 4,000 or 5,000 words a day, who can write a novel in six to eight weeks (Mike Stackpole—a name perhaps some of you have heard of—is a particular subject of envy on my part). It was a relief to me to discover that there are others who have similar problems. However, knowing I am not the only one doesn't get things written any faster.

Another contributing factor to the glacial nature of my output is the fact that I am never completely satisfied with anything I write. I always want to have another pass at it. Eventually, however, you reach the point where you have to let go—and I usually can't stand to look at whatever it is for weeks or months afterward. A friend once told me that every good writer has a similar problem—implying that the fact that I had such feelings meant that I was a good writer. I hope that's true. I take considerable comfort in the sales figures for things I have written. And each time I am asked for my autograph, each time someone tells me how much they enjoyed some item I wrote for **Traveller** or one of the other games I've worked on over the years, it makes the bruises on my forehead fade a little more.

Loren K. Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Mar 27, 2000, Mysteries

For those of you who were always a little disappointed you weren't born a Vilani, Robert Eaglestone has created step-by-step instructions for converting your current name to Vilani. As an example, here's my name converted to Vilani (you'll need to check out the Web site to make sense of the next few lines):

Loren "**Traveller**" Wiseman
Step 1: lorennamesiwtraveller
Step 2: (no truncation necessary)
Step 3: no diphthongs to convert.
Step 4: Letter substitutions: lorennamesiwtraveller *irorennamesiwtraveaguker iraarennameshiriuurraueaguuker*
Step 5: Consonant + Diphthong modifications: *iraarennameshiriuurraueaguuker iraaraanameshiriiraguuker*
Step 6: Break into family + given name (arbitrary): *Iraaraanamesh Iriiraguuker*
Enjoy! By the way, this is neat, but it would be even neater if some kind soul would automate it for us. Do I have any volunteers for a little *gratis* programming?

Mysteries

In next week's **JTAS**, we'll be running a variant by Ian Mackinder on an alternative to

the Ancients. It is a variant because **GDW** has already defined the "reality" of the Ancients in the supplement Secret of the Ancients. There are a few things that occurred to me as I was reading Ian's article, however, and I thought I'd share them with you.

Secret of the Ancients was one of the most anticipated books **GDW** ever published. In previous adventures, like **Twilight's Peak**, we had dropped hints about the Ancients that had fueled the fire. The fans wanted to know every detail—at least, they said they did. At the time, however, we were too naive to know one of the most important principles of marketing: what people say they want and what they actually want are often two radically different things (and sometimes what they actually want and what they buy are equally different).

Secret of the Ancients cleared up all the questions about the Ancients. The fans wanted every mystery explained, every loose end tied up, every detail mapped out to three significant digits. This seemed like a good idea at the time, but once people knew the Secret, a lot of them felt—disappointed. Which was almost inevitable. Anticipation is always much more exciting than possession—this is the main cause behind "buyer's remorse*"— and nothing we could have put into **Secret of the Ancients** would possibly have satisfied people's expectations. The book gave people what they said they wanted—indeed, it gave them what they probably thought they wanted. But in the final analysis, knowing the secret made it seem—mundane.

A second problem that has come up over the years is that the Secret of the Ancients is no longer much of a secret. The average citizen of the Third Imperium is still in the dark, but it's a rare **Traveller** fan who doesn't know the basic facts about the Ancients. This is unavoidable because in getting the information to GMs, we also supply it to players, and pretty soon the "secret" is out. There are two solutions to the first problem, and both of them have disadvantages:

First, you can reveal the secret, and in the process expose an even deeper mystery—the "Every answer creates three more questions" approach. This keeps the sense of mystery, but can be a slippery slope without proper planning. If you aren't careful, you fall into the trap of continually "upping the ante" and make each successive mystery grander than the one before. You eventually run out of ideas—there is only room for a finite number of primordial omnipotent/omniscient beings in a given universe.

Second, you never really reveal the complete secret—I call this the "TV series" approach. You continue to give out bits and pieces of the picture indefinitely—you answer a few immediate questions, but never really settle the ultimate mystery (unless the show is canceled and you have to have a final episode—sometimes not even then). This also requires careful planning or the readers get irritated by being strung along.

I'm still not completely sure which of these approaches is superior—but right now I lean toward number two.

Iraaraanamesh Iriiraguuker
Editor, **JTAS**

* Buyer's remorse is the tendency to want to return something after you bought it, especially very expensive items.

Apr 03, 2000, Imperium

Imperium was not a **GDW** game originally. It was designed by the same people, but first published as a title of the **Conflict Game Company. GDW** had purchased **Conflict Games** in 1977, and **Imperium** was but one of several titles we chose to release under the **Conflict Games** label. Marc Miller has a thumbnail history of **CGC** on his Web site.

Imperium began as a speculation about what might happen if two opponents in a war were not evenly matched. After considerable discussion, the basic framework of the game was laid out: one player was the technologically inferior but highly energetic Terrans, the other played the governor of a minor province of a vast, technologically superior but politically corrupt interstellar empire. The Imperial player's main problem was convincing an uncaring and distant government to give him the budget necessary to oppose the aggressive Terrans nipping away at his territory. **Imperium** was a successful title, and went through several reprints and revisions.

A major one occurred when **GDW** closed down **Conflict Games** and released **Imperium** as a **GDW** title. **Imperium** was more than just a wargame—it was also a political and economic simulation. The Terran player had to carefully plan how best to use his limited resources, and wait for weaknesses in order to grab off another few Imperial systems. The Imperial player had to walk a tightrope of his own. On the one hand, if he held the Terrans at bay, it would be proof that they were not much of a threat, and the central government would cut his budget. On the other hand, if the Imperial player was defeated too soundly, he would be replaced and his career would be over.

During this time (as you all know) **Traveller** appeared. It was decided to tie the two storylines together, and the empire of Imperium became the Vilani Second Imperium, the Ziru Sirka of the **Traveller** universe. **Traveller** players got a richer and more interesting history, while **Imperium** players could tie their games into the background of **Traveller.** From **GDW**'s viewpoint, this was a benefit, as it introduced wargamers to RPGs, and roleplayers to the world of board wargaming. Later editions of **Imperium** included direct references to the **Traveller** game background (including a booklet giving one of the most detailed histories of the Vilani Imperium ever to see print), and the symbol used in Imperium for the Imperial player became the symbol of the Vilani Ziru Sirka in **Traveller**.

This indicates an important principle of game design, which is not to reinvent the wheel. We needed an empire, so rather than invent a totally new one, we took a perfectly usable one we already had.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Apr 10, 2000, Various

First, kudos to Lonnie Foster, who responded to my request for a little *gratis* programming expertise by automating Robert Eaglestone's Vilani name converter. Since the **Illuminator** announcing it, I have also received a Word 97 macro by *ab@rossmack.com* How soon before we have them for Vargr, Zhodani, Aslan, and all the others? I don't think people will be needing one for Galanglic.

Shoe Salesmen of the Third Imperium

One of the first things you realize about creating a background for a game is that you

cannot come close to detailing everything (unless your game world deals with the inside of a one-room efficiency apartment). In games such as **Traveller,** where you have thousands of star systems and (potentially) as many cultures, it is a Sisyphean labor just to cover the main points (Sisyphus was the character in Greek myth condemned to roll a stone uphill forever—once he got it to the top it rolled to the bottom and he had to start over). Consider how much it would take just to cover one world properly, and then multiply that by 11,000. Never mind that each world is likely to have numerous different cultures (how many radically different cultures are there on Earth, for example). As the game's creators, we were more or less forced down certain roads, however. We dealt with things people would find interesting, or that we ourselves found interesting—wars, political infighting, rebellions, commerce, civil wars, assassinations, and so on. We didn't deal with the mundane, everyday aspects of existence—like shoe salesmen.

"Shoe Salesmen" was a little joke around **GDW.** It represented all of the common, everyday aspects of life that we could never hope to describe in a lifetime of writing—not if we were to cover things that were actually important to the game. It started (as best I can recall) when we received a letter from a fan who wanted a complete list of every occupation in the Imperium (I forget why he wanted to know—maybe he never explained). Marc started the list with shoe salesman, and the discussion went downhill from there.

All of this brings me to my main point—simply because we never mentioned something doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. The corollary to this statement is also true—simply because we never said something is common doesn't mean that it is rare. We never specifically mention shoe salesmen—are there no shoe stores in the **Traveller** universe? Do you buy shoes from a vending machine? Do they grow on trees? Are people born with shoes?

We never dealt with some subjects because we didn't want to provoke a controversy. Religion is a good example—if we say the Third Imperium is atheistic, then we may offend many devoutly religious people. If we say the Imperium is Christian, then we may offend those of other religions. Religion is a topic we never covered in detail (we occasionally mention religions, but we never dealt with the question on an Imperium-wide basis), so we could leave the question up to the individual GM to decide.

We never dealt with some subjects because we felt there were more important things to focus attention on. How many people are left-handed in the Third Imperium? Do people still drink coffee? What is the music like? Do all of the chairs have holes in the back so tailed aliens can sit in them? These are the sort of things that can be referred to in throwaway descriptive text, or hinted at in illustrations, but they are not worth covering in detail except on rare occasions (like the tokaj wine referred to in a previous editorial).

Then there are things that are kind of in-between, that are important, but we never deal with them properly. How common is cloning? Are there worlds where it is illegal? Can childless couples take DNA from both parents and fuse them to produce a child? Can single people create children by fusing DNA from their own germ cells? We have dropped hints from time to time, but have never addressed the question directly (and I won't here either—there is not room).

The universe is a huge place, and I (for one) have been working on describing it for almost 25 years. I still have quite a ways to go.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Apr 17, 2000, Movies and Traveller

In an e-mail conversation a short time ago, I was reminded of one of the truly bad sci-fi movies of all time, **Battle Beyond the Stars** (I use the term "sci-fi" in connection with this film because I refuse to use the label "science fiction" on something this abysmally bad). You now the one—Richard Thomas, Robert Vaughn, and George Peppard in a plot lifted from **The Magnificent Seven** (which took it from **The Seven Samurai***, which took it from a Hellenistic Greek work called **Seven Against Thebes,** which doubtless swiped the plot from a Neanderthal stage play). The film has a number of memorable features—the talking spaceship with mammary protuberances . . . the blonde space warrior ditto . . . the same lame FX shots over and over ad naseam. After concluding the e-mail discussion of the flick, the first thing that occurred to me was that this movie should top the list of "Films NOT to use as Inspiration for **Traveller.**" The second thought that occurred to me was that SF films often lifted elements from other genres (**Outland** borrowed heavily from **High Noon,** to name one example). My third thought is the basis for this editorial—it is pretty easy to borrow Traveller campaign elements from SF films. Consider, however, non-SF films as inspiration for **Traveller.** The main problem is to change enough of the main elements to prevent the players from figuring out which film(s) you are using—or at least delay the realization for a while.

Certain film genres are more useful than others. Westerns have many elements that can be swiped by a clever GM. They often deal in mythic archetypes (good guys and bad guys), and some of the plots can be lifted almost perfectly intact. **High Noon** was turned into **Outland,** as I mentioned above. Good candidates are too numerous to list, but I always felt that **Rio Bravo** would make a nice situation for a group to be sucked into, although perhaps not as the main protagonists. One of my favorite westerns, **The Big Country** (I'll be happy to explain why I like this movie somewhere other than here), is another one where elements can be lifted, but the plot as a whole is not well-suited to most RPG groups.

For those running military campaigns, war movies provide a rich source of characters and plot elements, although the main plot threads may not be usable. Few romantic comedies need be considered, although something like **Romancing the Stone** could be usable. Political thrillers and spy movies are excellent source material for GMs who like a convoluted, wheels-within-wheels style. Films like *La Femme Nikita*, **Mission Impossible** (film and TV series), and **Seven Days in May** are rich veins of plot-element ore waiting to be exploited.

"Caper" movies, where the plot hinges around a group brought together (usually by a charismatic leader) to pull off some daring criminal act, are an overlooked source of ideas. **The Sting**, **Maverick** (which counts as a western also), and **Ocean's Eleven** are merely the start of a lengthy list.

Most good movies (and no small number of bad ones) have something that can help a GM make a better campaign—a character, a secondary plot element, an overall theme that transcends the limits of a specific genre. Movies are art, they are literature, and they are thought-provoking (the good ones, anyway), but at their heart they are entertainment. So are roleplaying games.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Or did **The Seven Samurai** borrow the plot from **The Magnificent Seven**? I forget.

Apr 24, 2000, A Confession

Before I get to the confession, I'd like to make an observation. I believe that there are two broad categories of actors/actresses: those who play many different characters and those who always play the same character. The late Sir Lawrence Olivier was an example of the former. He could submerge himself so deeply into a role that he vanished. When I first saw the movie **Khartoum**, I got to the end and found myself wondering "Where was Olivier?" I read the credits, and discovered he played the Mahdi, one of the major characters in the film (you really should see it, it is a cracking good adventure). A second viewing confirmed that Olivier was indeed the Mahdi, but his voice and mannerisms were completely different from his own (compare his character in **Khartoum** with his characters in **Marathon Man** and **The Boys from Brazil**). James Garner is an example of the latter type of actor. Almost without exception, every character he plays is pretty much the same—Maverick, Rockford, the hero in **Support Your Local Sheriff,** the scrounger in **The Great Escape**, and so on—but this is OK because he does it so well (I have never met James Garner, so I don't know how close Rockford/Maverick comes to his real personality).

What does this have to do with RPGs? Not much, except that there seem to be two general types of roleplayer as well—those who always do pretty much the same character and those who like to explore many different ones. Now, on to the confession:

I am not a roleplayer. This may sound strange coming from someone who has made his living from RPGs for the last 25+ years, so let me modify that a little by saying that I am not a true roleplayer. There are players who relish taking on a character radically different from their own personality—Lawrence Olivier roleplayers, I guess I could call them. I, on the other hand, always end up playing a James Garner character (even if they are technically different—my wizard was not much different from my warrior, my smuggler and my diplomat were pretty similar, and so on). But where I differ from James Garner is that I don't do my characters especially well. I find it almost impossible to stay "in character" during a game, and I will often engage in social chit-chat while it's not my turn (which irritates some people). When I have to converse with a PC, I always do something along the lines of, "I ask him which way to the nearest castle," rather than, "Prithee, good sir, whither may be found Castle Grunstein?" I am not especially interested in exploring the existential angst of how it feels to be a half-elf/half-orc/undead/ninja/chainsaw-warrior faced with a moral quandary. I'm not a very good actor, and being forced to talk in monosyllables simply because my character is a barbarian warrior went against my grain.* This doesn't mean, however, that I don't enjoy RPGs—I do. I like to watch the interaction between people as they try to solve problems, and I enjoy escaping from the 20th century for a while (whether it is to go to the 11th or the 54th doesn't matter much). I like dungeon crawls, but I prefer more wide-ranging, open-air adventures, or quests of some kind. I'm not very good at puzzles.

"So," I hear you ask, "if you're not a roleplayer, what are you?" I am a miniatures gamer—a "*lead pushe*r" as we sometimes call ourselves (so-called because we move little lead/pewter/plastic figures across a tabletop). That's what I do as a hobby—and that is what I am really, truly interested in. Roleplaying grew out of wargaming (and I have no doubts on that score—not only did I watch it happen, I helped it along). There are RPG aspects to many miniatures games—especially the so-called "skirmish" wargames—but the primary feature of both types of games is entertainment.And before you ask, I'm a really, really lousy GM—but that's another story.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, JTAS

* One Dungeon Master came up with a solution to the dichotomy between my obvious intelligence as a player and the complete lack of it in my character. I had a character

with the minimum IQ possible, but the maximum strength; my comrades used to joke that when they had to leave me to guard the mules, it was always tough to decide which mule to leave in charge. One adventure, the DM arranged for me to discover a magic sword, which engaged in a battle for mastery of my character's mind—and won. From then on, I played the sword controlling the hulking warrior, and everyone was satisfied.

May 01, 2000, Wargaming LARP

One of the comments on the discussion board this week used the term "*freeform*" which was defined as an Australian word for live-action roleplaying (LARP). It occurred to me that I was doing this almost 25 years ago, although perhaps not quite as the term is currently used. I bring this up mainly to reminisce about the "good old days," but partly to remind people that this sort of thing can still be done today, it just requires as much work to do well as it ever did.

Many of the staff at **GDW** were gamers. At the time the company was founded (1973), RPGs did not formally exist, so this meant board and tabletop (miniatures) wargaming. Mostly . . .

Seeing the word "*freeform*" in the discussion reminded me of a type of game I used to participate in. These were sometimes known as "*freeform*" games, but they were also called "*free Kriegspiel*" (after the German word for wargame), and "double-blind" games. The games involved few (if any) formal rules, several umpires, and a number of gofers. It was best played on a college campus over the weekend, where you could get use of a building with a number of small rooms adjacent to each other, but you could also use a large auditorium, cafeteria, or hall if it had a lot of tables well-separated from each other. You also needed a lot of people, about evenly split between players and "staff" (for want of a better word). They were called double-blind games because (unlike conventional board games) neither side could see the "board" (if there actually was one).

The players would be split into teams of one or more people, depending on the scenario. If the game was a battle, they might be a unit commander and his staff officers. If the game was more diplomatic or political, each team might represent a government minister, a bureau, a political faction, or an organization. The staff would be a chief umpire and some assistants, mostly gofers who would run back and forth between the various teams and the central umpire. If the game was a battle, the umpire might have a central map, but this was not necessary. Games always had some kind of conflict, usually (but not always) military.

If the thing were properly organized, each team would get a pre-game briefing as to their situation, available assets, and goals. Military commanders would be given maps (sometimes incomplete), summaries of their assets and the expected opposition, and any orders from superiors. Politicians would get goals, details of their power-base, and so on.

The game would proceed in turns (length determined by the umpire), and a team would receive and react to reports generated by the umpire or by other teams, issue orders, and (if necessary) communicate with other teams. The umpire and staff adjudicated actions as the game proceeded, often making things up on the fly (news of a military defeat might start anti-government rioting, for example). Actual face-to-face encounters between teams were limited by the time available in the turn, so you had to plan your discussions carefully and not waste time. Written communications were allowed in most cases, but if you forgot to address them properly, you never knew where they might end up.

The advantage of games like this is that there need be no rules for simulating misunderstood communiques or poorly- worded orders—the players handle that themselves. The "fog of war" is naturally present, and the phenomenon known as the "200' general*" does not exist. Units waltz merrily into traps. People forget to tell the prime minister what they

are doing, so he concludes a treaty with the people you are about to invade. Subordinates misread their maps and send vitally-needed reinforcements to the wrong flank.

In one game I helped run, we were simulating the War in the Falklands. A minor official on the Argentine side decided to issue a fake press release announcing that the British had accidentally shot down a civilian airliner. The umpire decided the world press would immediately leap upon the story. The player acting as the British prime minister went ballistic, demanded an explanation from the military commander on the scene, and when one was not forthcoming, relieved the CO of his command. The story was soon revealed as a fake, but not before the Argentine players took full advantage of the chaos.

I played in another scenario set in a sleepy western town on the Mexican border about 1880. This set-up, unlike most, had a tabletop with model buildings and miniature figures—but the kicker was that the players did not move the figures—the umpire and his team did. I knew which figure was "me" but I didn't know which of the rest were other players and which were creatures of the umpire. I was a US marshal, trying to intercept a wagon-load of arms being smuggled to revolutionaries in Mexico. Other players were the smuggler, the revolutionary, a couple of bank robbers, a few cowboys out to get drunk, and a wealthy heiress trying to elope with the love of her life and elude her father's thugs.

Games like this can be highly entertaining, but the most fun comes afterward, during the debriefing session, when everyone gathers and reveals who did what to whom. This is where you discover that the fellow you bribed had been taking money from both sides—and managed to get to a country without an extradition treaty before the game ended.

To play, you don't need rules, dice, or pros of any kind. You do need a lot of people, a lot of imagination, and a lot of work. It can be a lot of fun.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* A phrase alluding to the fact that a player can see the whole table at a glance, and thus has information his genuine counterpart would not.

May 08, 2000, Trivia

Looking over the text for **Rim of Fire** has brought back many memories, especially when I look at the place names. I thought some of you might find it enlightening if I were to go over where some of these names came from.

When naming the systems in the original Solomani Rim sector, we were covering area partly mapped out in **GDW**'s **Imperium** (which we had by then decided to incorporate into the background history of **Traveller**'s Third Imperium), so many of the names came from there. We also invented many of them (primarily the Vilani and Vegan ones), but the vast majority have roots in "reality" (well, more or less—some of the inspirations are from literary or mythological sources). Many were things we knew of for one reason or another, and thought would make interesting place names. I'll get to some details in a moment (especially on the ones I contributed), but here's a start:

We took names from sources as varied as Greek and Roman mythology (Castor, Pollux, Diomedes, Aeneas, Hephaistos, Herakles, Menelaus, Medea, Odysseus, Polyphemus, Poseidon, and Prometheus), geography (Lompoc, Luzon, Ascalon, Calgary, Cameroon, Cathay, Champa, Epirus, Flanders, Aquitaine, Omsk, Santorini, Saskatoon, Saxe, and Scandia), famous historical figures (Cicero, Aristotle, Gladstone, Sequoyah, Suleiman, Ptolemy, and Scipio), Shakespeare (Coriolanus, Ariel, Oberon), colors (Alizarin, Cyan, Ochre, Umber), Arthurian mythology (Lyonesse, Morgana, Parsifal), literature (Furioso, Cuchulain),

Viking mythology (Albrecht, Fenris, Loki), and assorted entries from other cultures (Amaterasu, Kukulcan, Ormadz, Siva, Ganesh).

Specific entries from the "weird knowledge" category include:

Chernozem is a type of soil, found in Ukraine and other places, and especially well-suited to the cultivation of wheat.

Chinon is a town and a castle in France. The ruins of the castle are still standing, and are occasionally used by movie-makers for historical or fantasy settings (*Chinon* features prominently in **The Lion in Winter,** for example).

Desdemona is the name of Othello's wife in the Shakespeare play, but it holds a special meaning to me. My mother was born in the Texas town of Desdemona (which no longer exists), and it was one of my father's pet names for her.

Dunsinane is from **Macbeth** (which my brother the actor calls "the Scottish play"). Estigarribia authored a history of the Chaco War, one of Marc's areas of interest.

Haddad is Arabic for "smith," and is one of the more common names in Lebanon. It was also the name of one of my university professors.

Hamilcar and Hasdrubal are Carthaginian male names, and are relatives of Hannibal. Add Hanno to this list and you now know most of the known Carthaginian male names.

Hoatzin and Merganser are birds, and spring from the mind of John Harshman, who was (and still is) a fervent bird watcher and naturalist.

Krypton—OK, who doesn't get this one? It's an element, of course, but it's got a long tradition as a world name also.

Labrys is the double-headed axe of the Mycenean Greeks.

Miskatonic is a fictitious river/town/university in New England, site of many of the stories of the Cthulhu cycle. New Greenpernt is a little esoteric. It is the home of King Bushwick the Thoity-Thoid, a character in an episode of the old **Rocky and Bullwinkle** animated cartoon.

Nonsuch is a name of a British warship from the **Hornblower** stories of C. S. Forrester—there may have been a genuine ship with this name, but my memory fails me here.

Noricum is one of the provinces of the Roman empire. Nyarlathotep is also from Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos.

Okefenokee is a swamp in the southeastern United States (for extra credit on the final exam, explain why Mudge is located nearby).

Oz is a magical land far, far over the rainbow. They have talking scarecrows, a yellow brick road, an emerald city, and a large animal with a pouch that jumps around on its hind legs.

Pagliacci and Scaramouche came about because I needed some world names to go in the Harlequin subsector, and I thought "jester" was too trite. I decided not to use "Bozo" for obvious reasons (Krusty had not yet been created).

Remulak ("a town in Fraaance") is, of course, a tribute to the SNL routine "The Coneheads," performed with grace and style by Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin.

Sebasta is the Greek form of Augustus, and lives on in the city named Sevastopol.

Thetis (aka "*Thetis of the Silver Feet*") was one of the sea nymphs mentioned in the **Iliad,** and (I believe) the mother of Achilles—but don't quote me.

Twylo comes from a rather surreal episode of the old Dick van Dyke Show, where Danny Thomas played an alien invader from a planet called Twylo.

The most interesting feature of all of this was that we pretty much dredged these things out of our collective memories. I do not recall any of us consulting a reference work (and I am writing this essay without references as well, so those of you with on line encyclopedias can check my facts and gloat if you catch me in a minor error—my memory is not what it used to be). Sometimes, I think the fact that my mind is filled with stuff like this could be

evidence that I am over-educated. I mentioned this to my friend John Harshman recently (while we were tromping through a local wildlife refuge near Austin) and he remarked that it didn't matter, since I had a career where such a thing was a benefit.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 15, 2000, Playtest

I'm going to reminisce about the early days again, since that seems to be a popular topic. I don't remember if the escapade I am about to describe was the first **Traveller** adventure I participated in, but it involved my first character, and it occurred during the pre-publication playtest, which makes it one of the earliest **Traveller** sessions. Frank Chadwick was the referee. I'm not sure if Marc Miller was present or not, but there were two or three other players besides myself, one of them John Harshman.

My character was named Henson Stringfellow (after two early British aeronautical pioneers—whom I know only from a short speech delivered by Hardy Kruger in the movie **Flight of the Phoenix**). His stats have long since vanished, but he was an ex-army forward observer in his early 30s. John Harshman played an unemployed merchant officer. There were several other players, whose names escape me. Our group had washed up on a back-water world (without a ship or significant assets), and one of our number came up with the brilliant idea of seeking employment as hunting guides in order to earn enough to buy passage someplace (anyplace) else. The world was sparsely populated, but was used as a hunting preserve by indolent rich tourists from a nearby planet. We managed to acquire a working knowledge of the local sporting animals and were hired by a wealthy industrialist to accompany his sons on a hunt.

The hunters consisted of the industrialist's two sons. The eldest was a genuine sports-man, and his group consisted of his wife and a couple of friends. The younger son was a ne'er-do-well, accompanied by a number of pleasure-seekers, sycophants, and toadies of both sexes. So we have a hunting party, two guides without a clue and a world that just hap-pens to have an indigenous anti-government rebellion taking place in the outback (which the government defeated last year—according to their press releases).

I think you all can see where this is going . . .

One of the party's two air/rafts (containing Henson and the sportsman's party) was damaged by a rebel MANPAD (Man-Portable Air Defense) missile, and forced down in the woods. The air/raft containing the sportsman's brother (and John Harshman's character) floored it and vanished over the horizon. With consummate skill, the air/raft driver (an NPC) managed to keep the craft from crashing, but the sportsman was severely injured and one of his hunting buddies was killed. This left Henson, the wife, the air/raft driver, and the one surviving hunter (before anyone tells me that air/rafts can't hold six people, I point out that this was a pre-publication version of the game), with four hunting rifles between us, a broken air/raft and a dead radio. Henson was the only one with any combat experience, and the ensuing firefight was a close-run thing. We were saved at the last minute by the return of the other air/raft, which drove off the rebels and managed to get all of us to safety (despite being heavily overloaded). John's character had forced the other driver to return, after KO-ing the brother and bullying the others into submission. The adventure won us a powerful ally (the sportsman, who recovered from his injuries), but also gained us an implacable enemy (the younger son, who was shown up as a coward before his friends and family).

Frank had few campaign resources—only a few notes on the world and the draft of the **Traveller** rules we were using at the time. He created a sketch map of the crash site on the

fly, and split the players into two groups as soon as we became separated in the game. The session took a few hours from start to finish, and a good time was had by all.

Upon reflection, aside from the air/rafts, there was nothing especially SF about the situation—a similar scenario could be set up in the American West in the 1880s, or in a Third World country in the 1990s. This is typical of a lot of SF games.

This adventure had several aspects that were to become cliches in Traveller. It began in a starport bar, and the climactic events were an ambush and a firefight. On the other hand, it was hardly a "dungeon crawl"—there was no linear sequence of events, and there were no pre-set goals (other than "take the clients on a good hunting trip"). There was no choreographed plan (unless Frank had all of it charted out in his head). The situation could have presented me (as Henson) with a moral quandary—should I stay and defend the survivors, or bug-out? I have to confess, however, that the notion of leaving the group to their fate never occurred to me until after the adventure was over.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 22, 2000, Dystopias

I freely admit that I don't much like the class of SF known as *dystopia* (the word originated as a modification of Thomas More's **Utopia**, and indicates the opposite). I don't know where it was first used; I first heard it in reference to Harry Harrison's story **Make Room! Make Room!** (the basis for the movie **Soylent Green**), but I'm sure it was used earlier (the genre certainly goes back at least as far as Orwell's **1984,** if not further).

It's not that I mind the dystopia as a cautionary tale (**Make Room! Make Room!** warned of the perils of overpopulation, for example), or as political/social commentary (such as **The Handmaid's Tale**). I just find them too depressing for use as a game background.

One of **Traveller'**s strong points, in my opinion, is that its background is space opera, with all the optimism and sense- of-wonder that label should carry with it. I don't care for cyberpunk stories/game backgrounds (I preferred the label neuromanticism for the genre, but I got outvoted), mainly because I am (generally) optimistic about the future. This does not seem to be a common belief today, I fear—I once heard the recent upsurge in popularity of historical novels is because Americans now believe the high point of American society is in the past. I for one hope this is not true. I believe that science and technology have (overall) left us better off than before. A visit to a cemetery that dates back more than 150 years will provide ample evidence (find some family plots from the 1850s or thereabouts, and note the number of infant burials). In my immediate family, I have an example. My dad had a sister (my aunt) who died of pertussis (the "whooping cough") when she was two years old. My own sister also had the disease at age two, but she survived with the aid of sulfa and is now a mother of four—five people who wouldn't be had it not been for the development of antibiotics. Her children never got pertussis—babies are now routinely vaccinated against it and many other killers.

The modern world has its problems, but as a student of history, I believe that these challenges can be overcome. **Traveller** reinforces that belief, and that is one of the many reasons I am overjoyed to have been associated with the game since its creation.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**
P.S.: If you want to read a hilarious parody of Soylent Green, check out David MacAu-

lay's Baaa. It is listed as a juvenile (probably because the protagonists are all sheep) but it is not a children's book.

May 29, 2000, The Future Isn't What It Used to Be

When I graduated from high school, I took a summer job for a few months before entering college that fall. This meant I had to get up at the crack of dawn and go to work. My father was a great believer in Franklin's advice about "Early to bed and early to rise ..." and usually went to bed at 10:00 PM (he was a supervisor at a pumping station for an oil pipeline). One night in July, however, the summer while I was between high school and college, both of us were up well into the small hours watching television. Neil Armstrong was leaving some footprints in the dust about a quarter of a million miles away.

When it was all over, my dad turned to me. "When I graduated high school," he said, "if someone had told me that men would walk on the moon within 50 years, I wouldn't have believed them. And if they'd told me I'd be sitting in my living room, watching it happen on a thing called 'television' I'd have thought they were crazy."

When my dad was born, Russia had a *Tsar* (they weren't called the Soviets at that time), rockets were something the average person saw only on the 4th of July, and airplanes were less than three years old. Cutting-edge technology was a miraculous new invention called "wireless telegraphy," and the notion of a person walking on the surface of the moon was limited to children's stories by Jules Verne or H. G. Wells. When he was growing up, my dad built a radio out of scrap wire, an oatmeal box, and a 5-cent crystal (which was the only component you couldn't find in a junkyard), and listened to the scratchy signals of the few commercial stations, amateur broadcasters, and the di-dah- dits of ships at sea. He died a few years ago. Last year, with the 30th anniversary of the first moon landing, I thought of his remarks again. I wondered what I would have said to someone, that summer in 1969, if they had told me that yes, America would send 12 men to walk on the moon, the event would be televised live to the largest audience in history, and we would never go back.

The Apollo program ended and nothing similar replaced it because NASA managed to do something I (at age 18) would have said was impossible: they made space-travel dull. The first moon landing was televised live and had an enormous audience world wide. One of the final moon landings was televised live, and at least one local station (so rumor has it) received a storm of viewer complaints because it interrupted reruns of The Lucille Ball Show. After Apollo 11, the "moon race" with the Soviets (they were still the Soviets back then*) ended, and many people lost interest in space. I used to read about the colonies we'd put on the moon/Mars/LaGrange-5 and dream of going there. About 1980, however, I concluded that I was never going to make it to space.

I used to believe we'd never send anything but machinery into space again. Now I'm not so sure—recent developments have made me more optimistic. NASA is pushing several projects like the international space station in cooperation with the ESA and even talking seriously about manned (non-robot) mission(s) to Mars. Private-enterprise groups like **Artemis** and the **Mars Society** are spring up in increasing numbers. Assuming I can afford the price of the ticket, I might get to see Armstrong's footprints on the moon after all. For the second time, and at a little closer range.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* They are, once again, the Russians now, and they still have a Space Research Institute.

Jun 05, 2000, The Future That Never Was

December 31, 1999 brought numerous television shows about what various eras thought life would be like in the year 2000—the gist of every show being some comment like, "Where are all the flying cars?" Back in the late Bronze Age, when I was in elementary school, I used to get home and watch TV to unwind after the pressures of the day (kicking back with a scotch was not an option in those days). The late afternoon fare back then consisted of one or two **Three Stooges** shorts, mixed with animated cartoons. Sometimes these cartoons were relatively new, but given the budgets of TV stations in those pre-cable, pre-superstation days, more often they were retreads from as far back as the 1940s. Being a history buff even then, I particularly enjoyed the WWII-vintage cartoons. I remember one in particular entitled "**Post-War Inventions**" which starred a character called Gandy Goose (don't ask me what studio produced them—I have no clue). The plot (if it could be called such) consisted of Gandy getting KOed by his pal (a black cat whose name I forget), and his subsequent hallucinatory dream about what marvels the future had in store once Adolf, Benito, and Tojo were dealt with. The "inventions" were pretty typical of the SF of the era: flying cars, pills that re-hydrate into full meals with a drop of water, robots that perform dreary household tasks, and so on. The dream deteriorated into slapstick fairly quickly, as our hero runs afoul of the automated household machinery (he gets caught in the washing machine, cleaned, pressed, folded, and stored in a linen closet). Stripped of the slapstick, the cartoon is an interesting example of the inability of accurately predicting the future.

It is not hard to find a prediction for any particular facet of present-day life somewhere in the mountain of past speculation. This is because SF writers and futurists have, over the years, predicted so much that almost anything can be justified. Taken as a whole, however, the track record of most is pretty dismal (Robert Heinlein's record is better than most, but even he had flying cars). In the more than two decades since **Traveller** was first published, technology has not advanced the way we predicted. But I don't feel too bad about this, as we've done no worse than anyone else, and a good deal better than some.

Take meals, for example. In the cartoons, you take a pill from a bottle, put it on a plate, add a single drop of water from an eyedropper, and it rehydrates to form a complete steak dinner, steaming hot. Some writers felt meals would eventually become a few pills, containing essential vitamins, minerals, and other condensed nutrients (ignoring the need for fiber and other components). More realistic predictions foresaw dehydration (WWII K rations brought instant coffee to every GI and it soon became a staple on grocery shelves after the war), and a few thought freezing would play a role (frozen foods were a pre-war invention, but they could be used only by large commercial concerns such as restaurants and hotels—individual household freezers did not become common until after the war). A few writers foresaw some form of "flash-cooking," so I suppose microwave ovens were predicted, but I am unaware of any serious prediction of the extent to which fast-food and take-out dining would come to dominate mealtime. Dehydrated foods are with us, but usually in the form of drink mixes, soups, sauces, and seasonings. Microwaving a frozen entree comes closest to the cartoons, I suppose.

Predictions concerning automation in general and computers in particular have proven wildly inaccurate. Bill Gates is rumored to have commented that he could foresee no need for anyone to ever have more than two (or four, or eight—the quotes vary) Megs of RAM. Office automation 30 years ago meant an electric typewriter and a phone with buttons instead of a dial (this in spite of the fact that a patent for a fax machine was issued in 1900, plus or minus five years). Most predictions about household automation revolved

around some kind of robot maid that would do the drudge work (like laundry and ironing). Factory robots have become commonplace, but they look nothing like the robots people imagined (as typified by the stainless steel golem displayed at the 1939 World's Fair). Of course, there is that humanoid robot Honda is developing . . .

My prediction for the future is this: our most educated, realistic, rational predictions of what's coming up will look as ludicrous to the people 50 years from now as a dishwasher with mechanical arms and a scrub brush looks to us.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

P.S.: Where are all those flying cars?

Jun 12, 2000, Potpourri

I chose Potpourri as a title this week for two reasons: 1) I don't have a single topic, and I propose to discuss a number of little things with little or no connection to each other, and 2) "potpourri" (along with "Albuquerque" and "chrysanthemum") is one of the few "spelling-bee" words I can spell correctly without having to check a dictionary, so I revel in it and try to work it in whenever I can.

Which leads me to spell-checkers, to computers in general, and to desktop publishing in particular. I am old enough to have graduated from college before the advent of the personal computer (and word processing software).* Every term paper I ever wrote was done on a typewriter (and all of my high school papers were written on manuals—I bought my first electric typewriter when I went away to college). To me, a spell-checker was a small, pocket-sized book called **50,000 Words: Spelled-Stressed-Divided.** This was, in essence, a dictionary minus definitions, which meant that it was shorter and therefore easier to look up a given word. You used it to check spelling, and where to hyphenate. My first experience with a word processor (of sorts) was when **GDW** acquired an **IBM** Electronic Selectric magnetic card typesetter. For the first time, I could type a document and save it to a magnetic card (actually, a bundle of several such cards if the document was very lengthy). I could call up the document days or weeks later, print it out, and make changes. Minor revisions were easy (no need to retype the whole page) and major revisions no longer required retyping the entire document. **GDW**'s first computer was a TRS-80, which was soon followed by a couple of **Apple** IIs and genuine word-processing software, with features such as search-&-replace, cut-&-paste, and a spell-checker. (Modern spell-checkers, by the way, do not eliminate spelling errors; they simply increase the proportion of properly spelled words in a manuscript. If you blindly accept the first choice the program offers, some interesting sentences can be created.) **GDW** soon moved into desktop publishing, which leads me into crackpots, my next topic.

For years, John Harshman and I collected what we labeled "crackpot literature" (a hobby immortalized in Ivan Stang's **High Weirdness by Mail**, now sadly out of date)—people who worship Beaver Cleaver (or claim to), who believe the Earth is flat (or hollow), that the Apollo missions were an elaborate hoax, that using Visa cards supports Satan, that Nazis are piloting flying saucers from a secret base at the South Pole, and other such nonsense (I apologize in advance to any of my readers who actually believe any of this.) One of the most amusing features of collecting these people's literature was its basic nature: printing by mimeograph or xerographic machines, artwork clipped from magazines and taped into place, handwritten headlines, maps and diagrams drawn in ballpoint pen . . . ah, the memories. DTP technology changed all that. The most rabid, frothing, psychoceramic loon can

now turn out a pamphlet that looks respectable. What fun is that?

The Internet has done something similar. The Web enables everyone to appear to be an expert, whether they know what they are talking about or not. With a properly tuned search engine and a lot of patience, you can find almost anything on the web—and almost nothing. This has always been true, of course, as the old admonition "Don't believe everything you read" shows. People are no more (and no less) gullible then they ever were, but the Internet makes it possible to spread claptrap at the speed of light, it seems. The Internet has made research on a wide variety of subjects easier, in the sense that more information is readily available from the comfort of home. But the information needs to be put through the same filters as before—just because it's on a spreadsheet doesn't mean it is any less nonsense.

Another facet of the Internet I have run into is people who expect too much of it. So much information is available at the click of a mouse that some people think the sum of human knowledge is available for them to Web-surf through. A year or two ago, I received an e-mail from a person searching for the organization of certain German military units in WWII (or WW-two-point-oh, as it is now called). My work with **GDW's Command Decision** led him to believe I knew where he should look. I told him the source of information **GDW** had used, which was (in part) in German organizational documents captured by the U.S. Army and now in the U.S. Archives (which is formally called the National Archives and Records administration. He asked for a URL, which I supplied. A few days later, he again e-mailed me, complaining that the URL led to an online index of the microfilmed documents, but that he wanted the URL to the documents themselves. When I told him they were probably only in microfilm (and he'd have to buy those or borrow them from a research library), he was shocked. He believed that every bit of information in every library and museum in the world had been scanned in and was available somewhere. He simply did not believe that he could not access every book in the **Library of Congress**, or view every exhibit in **the Smithsonian**—and he demanded to know why. I told him there simply was not enough time, money, or manpower to do that. Then I told him that more than 50 years after the end of the war, many of those captured German documents haven't even been microfilmed yet—they are still sitting in boxes in a warehouse in Virginia as far as I know—unsorted, unindexed, and largely untouched. I think his world-view was shattered—I never heard another word out of him. Maybe someday I'll be able to read the records of *Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost* on my home computer, but I don't think that's going to happen any time soon.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I still have my slide rule, too, but that's a rather painful memory I'd as soon forget.

Jun 19, 2000, Yanks in Space?

A common criticism leveled at **Traveller** over the years is that the universe is too close to contemporary American life. This is the "Yanks in Space" phenomenon—space travel in the game is just like going from JFK International Airport in New York to L.A. International, with a stopover at O'Hare along the way. This wasn't done out of chauvinism or the feeling that the USA would dominate space for millennia. There are several reasons for it.

First, the writers of the game were Yanks.* We were Americans, writing for an American audience, and we wrote what we knew. For quite some time, it never occurred to us that we needed to do other than that. I think many Americans don't realize the extent to which our culture is resented elsewhere in the world (and by many of us here). However, I think that many non-Americans don't realize the extent of culture differences within the U.S.

Consider minor differences in language (leaving aside the question of whether Americans actually speak English or not). The sandwich I had for lunch Saturday is what I grew up calling a sub (short for submarine sandwich). The convenience store down the street called it a po' boy (contraction of "poor boy"). Elsewhere in the country, the same sandwich is called a hoagie, and in other places a grinder. I grew up calling the carbonated beverage I drank with it pop, as in, "If you're going to the kitchen, bring me a pop." Elsewhere in the country, the same beverage is called "soda" or "soda-pop," and "tonic" in New England; but to me, soda is unflavored carbonated water, suitable for combining with whiskey, as in "scotch and soda"—and tonic is something that is mixed with gin. Frank Chadwick once told me he ordered a gin & tonic in New England and received a gin & cola.

Breakfast differs from place to place. "Everyone eats something for breakfast," my mother used to say. "Some people eat lunch for breakfast." Many Americans eat what is called a "continental breakfast," which is similar to what many Europeans consume. Where I grew up, however, breakfast required bacon or pork sausage, along with toast (which we ate hot, but elsewhere is consumed cold). When I travel to the Old South, and order breakfast, I find my meal often comes with a greyish-white substance on the side of the plate. This is called "grits" and is a requirement of a proper Southern breakfast (or used to be—things are changing as more Yankees move south). My father grew up eating it as a staple of his diet (calling it "hominy"), but chose not to inflict it on his children—we all thought it tasted like library paste. My family was divided on the question of okra as well. My mother loved it, but my father and the rest of us thought it was a slimy, green, nematode look-alike in plant form.

There are Americans who find squirrel, rabbit, and opossum delicacies. Crawfish (aka cra'fish, crawdads, and mud bugs) are consumed with relish by some and used as bait by others. When I first saw pig's feet in a grocer's freezer, I was a little taken aback. I grew up where corn-on-the-cob was dessert ("Eat your liver and you can have some sweet corn"), but my sister-in-law's father (of Italian extraction) felt it was suitable only for livestock. My father could not stand pizza, and I have cousins who believe tomatoes are poisonous. I don't like the way kiwi fruit looks (but I like eating it after someone else has removed the outside). There are Americans of Asian descent who find cheese revolting. We won't go into Rocky Mountain oysters, except to say that they (like *haggis*) contain parts of the sheep not considered edible by most of us.

It used to be felt that America was losing distinct local differences as television and national media brought a common culture to all. Recent studies show there are as many dialects as there ever were (not nearly as many as in England, of course), and the number of regional cuisines is certainly growing (fish tacos—the mind boggles). There is a single, overriding (and pretty bland) American culture, to be sure (that iridescent orange substance that goes by the name of "processed cheese food" is a representative example), but there are fairly spicy (to use a food-related term again) American subcultures also—and **Traveller** needs as much variety as you can put into it.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Not all Americans appreciate being labeled as "yank"—to many within the borders of the former Confederate States (physically or mentally), "Yankee" retains a pejorative connotation. To others, it refers to a New Englander. To still others, it refers to a rural inhabitant of Maine. To baseball fans, it refers to New York's team. I just noticed that I'm doing footnotes in almost every editorial now. Is anybody reading these things?

Jun 25, 2000, Great Old Ones

I am perpetually amazed at the extent to which **Traveller** fans like to hear us "*Great Old Ones**" rattle on about the early days. People seem to enjoy knowing that we did the basic design discussion for **Twilight: 2000** in the vehicles on the 17+ hour drive back from the **Dallas Origin**s.

This time I thought I would discuss some things we thought about doing but never did. Some of these have only the most tenuous connection with **Traveller**—in fact, many of them have no connection at all other than the fact that the same people worked on some of them.

With the resounding success of **GDW**'s first RPG, *En Garde*, we thought that a second book would go well. The proposed *En Garde* expansion would have contained rules for naval characters, but these would have drawn more heavily on the 18th Century and the works of C. S. Forrester rather than the 17th century and A. Dumas. A second section would have allowed for female characters (think of movies like **Forever Amber** or **Desireé**). The main section would have allowed for full-dress, umpired RPGing, probably using a different set of mechanics (perhaps something more like **Traveller**, but maybe not—in those days, we tended to come up with a totally new system for each game).

After **Traveller** had been out for a few years, Frank began urging us to try to think of RPG products that would expand our market by appealing to a different group of customers. One of the projects was given the tentative title **Guardian**, and would have been set in a post-apocalyptic near future. Each character would not be old enough to remember the pre-disaster world, but would have been trained in a specialty by one of the tribal elders— rote memorization of the repair and operation of pre-disaster equipment. Adventures would consist of exploration of ruined and half-ruined areas and the attempt to salvage and rebuild society. The mechanics were a development of the **Traveller** system, and an early version of what would eventually become **Twilight: 2000**'s rules. For a while, the project had the working title **Afterward,** but we felt that might be too easily confused with **Aftermath**. **GDW** had a number of post-apocalyptic projects that simmered on the back burner for years at a time. Parts of them eventually went into **Twilight: 2000.**

In the late '70s and early '80s, we came up with several horror and alien-invasion settings for possible games. One of these was called **Team Omega** (which was also the working title for our time-travel game), and would have had the subtitle "**Holding Back the Dark**." The premise of the game was that our world was subject to sporadic incursions by strange creatures from another dimension (or dimensions) and it was up to Team Omega to locate and deal with these attackers with minimal dislocation to civilization. The idea for this particular game was inspired by a cartoon we saw at an SF convention, showing Clint Eastwood as Harry Callahan from the **Dirty Harry** movies, smoking .44 in one hand and half-eaten hot dog in the other, standing over the bullet-riddled corpse of some half-rodent/ half-gargoyle. The caption was "It's dead . . . whatever it was." Much of this background was eventually to surface as part of **Dark Conspiracy.**

GDW made several attempts to do a fantasy system, but we never came up with one that we thought was good enough to have a chance against the competition. One of the candidates, **Companions of the Road,** was a pretty typical dwarves/elves/dragons-in-the-high-middle-ages fantasy world, but the mechanics of encounters, the layout of the land, and so on, were decided not by dice, but by letters, numerals, and punctuation marks—enabling a GM to use a favorite novel or story to determine the action.

Some of these and other ideas were not worth following up, but some of them (judging by later products by us and by other companies) probably were. I have noticed, over

the years, that there are often more good ideas than you have staff or resources to follow up. The art in running a game company is to allocate resources among those projects most likely to succeed.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'm not sure I like this label. I'm pretty great, but I'm not that old.** At least I still have all my hair, unlike every one of my brothers. The photo on my TX state ID card makes me look like I'm wanted in six states, however.

** I take some comfort in the fact that I have not yet reached the age where I get mailings from the AARP.***

*** That's "American Association of Retired Persons" for the benefit of those overseas. They have assembled a gigantic database of birthdays (collected from public data like driver's license records), and send you an invitation to join at periodic intervals commencing on your 55th birthday. They are ubiquitous, and difficult to avoid, and undertake massive legislative lobbying efforts on behalf of older Americans. There is, of course only one alternative to reaching 55 (not reach 55), and I do not choose to exercise it.

Jun 27, 2000, Hogwash?

Since the readers (you guys out there on the other side of the screen) enjoy learning things that reveal my thought processes, I thought I'd discuss some of my strongly held disbeliefs. I may step on a few toes in this essay, but I do not mean to belittle some of the things I discuss below, merely express my opinions on them. It is not my intention to be confrontational (despite my choice of title), and I certainly mean no ad hominem attacks or insults toward people who hold conflicting views to mine. If you believe one of the things I do not, let us agree to disagree, like civilized sentients. If we all thought alike, what a dull world it would be.

Before I start, however, let me say that I am a skeptic. Many people imbue that term with pejorative connotations, but all it means in my case is that I don't believe everything I read, and I think that extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof.* I think that the universe is a thing of nearly infinite complexity, and is fascinating and beautiful enough to satisfy me without adding what I consider to be nonsense elements to it. Maybe it's the historian in me, but I prefer to keep the real world separate from fantasies.

First of all, I don't believe in UFOs. To clarify that, I don't believe they carry intelligent extraterrestrial life, nor do I believe they are secret government experiments, Nazis from a secret base on the Moon, time travelers, or inter-dimensional visitors. I think they all have rational causes, but I also think it is possible that not all of these rational causes are recognized by mainstream science. I believe that the vast majority of UFO sightings are misinterpretations of common phenomena, that some are fakes, and that a good many are wishful thinking overcoming good judgment (people see what they expect to see most of the time). My theory on crop circles is that they are mostly caused by slow news days (and my proof of this is simple—count how many of them occur during the summer Olympics, as compared to non-Olympic summers).

I would like nothing better than to learn that there is life elsewhere in the universe, and I think that a genuine ET contact would be the greatest event in recorded history. I cannot deny it is possible for ETs to have contacted us in the past—but I've never seen convincing evidence of it (there are some fascinating unconfirmed stories out there—like the two green children mentioned in an 11th-century English chronicle).

Second, I'm not much of a believer in conspiracies, cover-ups, and string-pulling secret societies, either.** I am probably one of 10 people remaining in the U.S. who think Oswald killed John Kennedy alone. I do not think a conspiracy was involved in the assassination of Robert Kennedy or the death of Princess Diana, although I think the full truth about all of these events has yet to be made public. I don't think there is a government UFO cover-up, mainly because I don't believe in UFOs as such (see above), but I also don't think it's possible for the government (I'm a Yank, so I'm referring to the U.S. government here) to keep something that big a secret for very long (they couldn't stop the publication of the Pentagon Papers, after all). This is not to say I don't believe the government can't keep things secret, or that there have never been government cover-ups. I think that most coverups are trying to hide incompetence, and

this is as true of the U.S. government as it is of any other.

Third, I don't believe in spooks, ghosts, faeries, gnomes, sprites, "little people," spirits of the newly departed, demons, poltergeists, vampires, zombies, and things that go bump in the night. I have seen various "rational explanations" of all these things (such as the ever-popular "vampirism/lycanthropy is really rabies" theory), but most of them fail to satisfy. I have no doubt that there are a few people who really think they are vampires. I am certain there are a great many who wish they were vampires, and there are a large number who enjoy dressing the part.

Fourth, I don't think there is a bigfoot/sasquatch/yeti. I follow cryptozoology, and am willing to concede the possibility such a creature existed in the past. However, I believe, based on what I know of zoology, that if such critters are real, they are at such a low population density that they are effectively extinct. I have a friend who thinks it strains credulity that it is the only animal on the continent that has never been run over by a car (he points out that even Kodiak bears have been killed by cars).

Fifth, I am unconvinced that psionic powers (ESP, and so on) exist. I have several reasons for this, and there is no point in going into them here. I also do not believe in magick (but I do believe in magic of the Penn & Teller/Amazing Randi/David Copperfield sort).

Finally, I should hasten to add that I love fictional treatments of these things—I am fascinated by the development of conspiracy theories over the years, I find the contrasts between ghosts in Victorian literature and those in earlier and later eras to be very interesting, and I read the fantasy and horror novels of certain authors (King and Koontz especially) with great enjoyment. I think that any or all of these things make great gaming material. SF games cry out for psionic powers of some kind, and the addition of the rules to **Traveller** was almost required of the original designers. Global conspiracies, alien cover-ups, and mystical/magickal entities make gaming a richer experience, and form a vital part of many exciting genres. I have worked in such genres myself—and I have done a pretty good job of it, I think. It is all part of that suspension of disbelief so important to appreciating some forms of entertainment.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Another way of putting this is, "*If it sounds too good to be true, it probably isn't true.*"
** Considering that I work at **Illuminati World HQ**, many people will find this surprising. When I first came to work here at **SJ Games**, there were aspects of the place that seemed strange—the funny sounds and smells coming from that locked room next to the clone vats in the basement, the unmarked trucks that came to pick up the big pods from the greenhouse, the fax machine locked in the filing cabinet in Steve's office—but after Steve took me into the little room next to the employee lounge and injected that little purple

squid-thing into my brain pan, everything sort of fell into place, and it all seems normal to me now.

I've always wondered why there aren't any vampire nerds—are they afraid to come out even at night for fear the cool vampires will laugh at them and pin "Stake Me!" signs to their backs?

Jul 10, 2000, "Where do you want to go with GURPS Traveller?"

That's a question that I sometimes get as publisher. Fans want to know what my long-term plans are for the line. And, of course, **Traveller is** one of the few games to which you can really apply the words "long-term." The game was first published in 1977. Like my own Ogre, which was released at almost the same time, it's older than a lot of its players.

At any rate, sure . . . I hope that **Traveller** is just starting its history with SJ Games. I'm a **Traveller** fan, personally—I read and played it when it first came out—which is why I wanted to do **GURPS Traveller** in the first place.

Now, when people ask me about my plans, sometimes they mean "plans for the **Traveller** world" and sometimes they mean "for the line." My plans for the world are simple . . . I don't want to have any big plans. The whole premise behind the alternate history of **GURPS Traveller** was that I liked the pre-Dulinor, pre-Virus background. I wanted to continue it without any huge shakeups. And that's what we intend to do. Now, there will certainly be developments in this alternate universe, as the years go on. This is an exciting time in the history of the Imperium and its neighbors. Subsectors, sectors and megacorps will no doubt be shaken and changed. But the **Imperium** as a whole will go on in a recognizable form. If you like your campaign the way it is, you'll continue to find support for it here.

My plans for the line are more diffuse, and depend to a great extent on fan feedback, and on feedback from Marc and the other original **Traveller** creators who make up **Far Future Enterprises.** We will continue to put out new support as long as there's demand (which I expect will be forever) and as long as we keep the license (which I hope is forever). I'd like to continue to offer new types of support. For instance, we'll release a deck plans package later this year. If it's well received, there will be more. We keep working, in our copious free time, on ideas for more T-shirts, and maybe patches and insignia and similar useless fun neat shiny stuff. If there's interest and Marc approves, we might release miniatures, both 25mm figures and micro-scale ships. And so on.

And, of course, we want to keep this online magazine up and running. I'm a big believer in the Internet as a way to create and maintain communities for special interests, and the special interest that is **Traveller** certainly deserves a living meeting-place. So I want to wind up with a thank-you to you, for joining us. It's the readers who make **JTAS** possible.

Steve Jackson
Publisher

By the way . . . there's something that I think might be fun to try in the "**Brubek's**" chat area of **JTAS**. What would you folks think of an occasional series of chats "in persona"? For instance, I thought I might come on sometime in the persona of M. Happy, a Hiver trade representative visiting the Imperium to research style changes in Human furniture. (At least, that's what he SEEMS to be saying he's doing. M. Happy is sometimes a little bit hard to understand, but he's very friendly.) At any rate, M. Happy shows up in Brubek's and anybody who feels like it can ask him questions .. . which, as M. Happy, I will do my best to answer as a friendly helpful Hiver. And, of course, the **Traveller** universe offers no end of possible interesting visitors . . . an Imperial Xboat pilot, a Vargr corsair, a Navy PR officer

dodging the latest questions about the Dulinor affair . . . Does this sound like fun? Would y'all show up for such a thing? That's this week's poll . . . let us know what you think.

Jul 12, 2000, Conventions 2000

I am writing this editorial on the 6th of July, and I have only just returned from the **Dragon-Con Convention** in Atlanta, Georgia. Attending conventions is almost a requirement of a certain level of involvement with the game industry, and I have attended many such shows over the years. I will not discuss the various trade shows I have attended, because these are pretty much the same from year to year. Herewith, some ramblings on game conventions.

Gaming conventions are important because they enable designers to meet the end-user of the RPG product, and I think this is vital. It gets you a form of customer feedback that cannot be obtained any other way (at least not economically). Convention discussions with customers helps me keep a finger on the pulse of consumer demand.

The first convention I ever attended as a game company representative (rather than as a gamer) was the first **Origins**, held near Baltimore more years ago than I care to remember. **GDW** decided to rent a booth, and we all piled into Marc's panel van for the 17+ hour trip to Maryland. Long drives have a charm all their own, as I am sure many of you know from experience. I do not drive,* so my job on **GDW's** convention caravans was to sit in the passenger seat and keep whoever was driving awake. For the first few hours, this was easily accomplished by normal conversation. As time passed, however, I had to resort to arguments in order to keep the driver's attention, and these arguments had to become increasingly heated as time passed. I took up some odd philosophical positions on those drives . . .

That first **Origins** was memorable for a number of things, but the main one was the fact that the company in the booth next to ours had brought a shotgun (for whatever reason). I discovered this when one of their staff knocked it over. As the weapon fell, I caught an image of it out of the corner of my eye, pointing directly at me. I managed to vault the table in a single leap from a standing start, something I have never been able to do before or since (the fear reaction is a miraculous thing). The convention was held over the summer on a university campus, and we reported the incident to campus security immediately. On the next day, the booth was empty.

Conventions have several requirements on a gaming professional's time: sales time in the booth, seminars and presentations, demonstration games, and (last but not least) tournaments. Often, conventions are the best time to hold business-related discussions, especially for industry-wide organizations such as **GAMA** or the now-defunct **Game Designers' Guild.** For many years, I was (with Mike Stackpole) a member of the **GAMA Media Watch Committee**—our job was to collect information that could be used to defend games against the assorted accusations made by anti- gaming groups (this committee still exists, but we haven't had much to do lately). Conventions are good places for industry professionals to get together over a meal or a few drinks and talk shop (or not, as the case may be). Some of us even manage to get in a few games in our spare time.

I have many friends in the business I only see at conventions (the rest of the year, we communicate by phone and snail/e-mail). I get to meet the players and referees of **Traveller** and the other games I have been involved with over the years. I am, in a small way, something of a celebrity, and this is satisfying to my ego. I have not yet reached the point where being asked for my autograph is a chore—it was a thrill the first time, and it is still a thrill 20+ years later. I am a member of **SFWA** (**the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America**), and the little **SFWA** pin on my shirt collar/name badge opens many conversational doors with people I once knew only from book jackets. All in all, conventions enable

me to bask in the 60-watt bulb of my own notoriety, and pick up a little reflected glow from such as Larry Niven, Tom Clancy, and others.

Of course, conventions have their downside. They consume a considerable amount of time and effort (some of it hard physical labor). The booth has to be set up, manned on a consistent schedule through the show, and packed away securely for shipment afterward—the first and last tasks are normally hot, dirty tasks, as only the largest companies can afford to hire professional booth dressers. Jill Lucas (formerly of **FASA**) once complained to me that the first either of us ever saw of each other at a con was after we had both unloaded a truck and set up a booth, which meant that we both smelled like overheated horses. Conventions require a great deal of talking, much more than normal. Answering questions, explaining what's new and what's coming out next, participating in panel discussions, presentations, demonstration games, tournament games, and seminars—sometimes I talk more in one day of a con than I do the week before or after. I carry hard candies (I prefer wintergreen), both to keep my throat moist and to keep me from having breath like a water buffalo. I spend a lot of time on my feet, sometimes for hours at a stretch, and this aggravates the pinched nerve in my spine. Conventions are tiring mentally as well—answering questions (often the same questions over and over) takes a toll. And, of course, at the end of the show comes the grueling task of taking down the booth, packing everything for shipment, and getting home without losing anything important.

Normally, I return home from a convention mentally and physically exhausted, and try to get as much rest of both kinds as possible. Another factor is what I call my "post-convention depression," which I am subject to after almost every show. The excitement of a convention is very exhilarating, and returning home is always a bit of a bummer. I have a stack of snail/e-mail to go through (both at home and at the office), a suitcase full of laundry, and all sorts of tasks at home and at work that need to be picked up where they left off—very few of which have gone away while I was out of town.** For a few days, I have been sought after, fawned upon, adulated, and asked for autographs. It is a bit of a let-down to return to the ordinary workaday world after something like that, and sometimes I need a few days to get back with the program. I usually do this by looking forward to the next convention, because I think they are a net gain. I like going to cons, even in an official capacity.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I am very nearsighted in one eye, and farsighted in the other, and even with corrective lenses, I have almost no depth perception, especially for rapidly moving objects like automobiles. Driving (to me) is a horrible, nerve-wracking experience that I gave up long ago. If I lived in New York City, no one would think I was in the least odd. I can't hit a baseball, either—I have no idea where the blasted thing is until after it has gone past—and I cannot catch thrown objects except under certain specific conditions.

** One of the major disappointments of my adult life was the discovery that if you leave your work out, elves do not come in the night and do it for you. Then again, maybe that only works with shoemakers?

Jul 24, 2000, Afterward

This editorial was suggested to me by a conversation I had with Steve Jackson and a discussion on the **Traveller Mailing List** concerning errata. Basically, someone called a binding mistake an "*erratum*" (singular) and was taken to task for it (an innocent enough mistake). I thought, however, that a discussion of the horrors that can happen to a product after it goes to the printer might be interesting.

First, however, a digression: Almost 20 years ago, I bought a copy of **The Killer Angels** by Michael Shaara (an excellent novelization of the Gettysburg battle) and in it I discovered a rather glaring typo—a word with transposed letters that would have been caught by any spell checker worthy of the name (software or meatware), and which was in a position that was easy to spot. In the early 1990s, a movie based on the novel (**Gettysburg**) came out, and the novel was reissued. I bought a copy (my first two copies had dissolved from heavy reading), and was interested to discover the same typo still present. I take comfort in the fact that even major publishers cannot eliminate errors, even in a new printing 20+ years later.

Assuming the product was perfect when it left the production department, here's a few things that can still go wrong:

• In the old days, physical paste-ups were sent to the printer. These were stiff card sheets with the type and artwork stuck into place (usually using a sticky wax or a special spray adhesive). The pasteups were placed in a vacuum frame under a plate of glass and a special camera photographed them. Things could fall off and either vanish completely or re-stick themselves somewhere else, with predictable results. The technician operating the camera was trained to handle pasteups carefully, and was even capable of replacing things if it was clearly evident where they were supposed to go, but sometimes things went wrong.

• As technology progresses, even finding problems in the proof may not be enough. A printer that uses direct-to-plate presses will provide digital proofs to check before printing. While things are not supposed to change between proof and the plate . . .

Nowadays, many printers no longer use cameras, but various technical glitches can still occur—the font you have used may be incompatible with the printer's system, and the multiplication signs in your carefully crafted formulae might be replaced with random symbols. These things seldom occur with experienced printers, of course, but they are always a possibility. Also, this sort of thing can still be caught in the bluelines (the quick and cheap one-shot proofs that printers provide to make sure everything has gone together properly) before the printing process starts.

• Errors can creep in during printing. Running a printing press requires considerable training and experience. Few people realize that a sizable chunk of the cost of printing something is the salary for the operator of the press. When **GDW**'s first game was printed, back in 1973, we all decided to go to the printer and watch the maps being printed (it was the boardgame **Drang Nach Osten,** for those who remember the Europa Series games). The pressman fitted the printing plates to the press, mixed the second ink color (the maps were black and blue printed on a cream-colored stock) and loaded the ink onto the press, loaded a stack of paper into the bin on one end of the press, and ran off a few sheets to test the ink coverage. He twiddled some dials, made a few adjustments, and ran some more test sheets. When everything was ready, he waved us over and showed us a little counter on the side of the press he had set to the quantity we wanted printed—1,000 copies. Everyone stood back, the pressman hit a button, and the press roared into life—for less than three seconds. It never even got up to full speed before it had run off the 1,000 copies. The pressman removed the plates, and fitted the second set into the press (the ink colors were the same) and printed the second set after running a few test sheets. When all five maps were printed, he took the press apart and thoroughly cleaned everything the blue ink had touched, because the next job needed a different color. All in all, it took about two hours to print 5,000 sheets, and the press was running for a total of less than two minutes. This, of course, was a sheet- fed press (for really large print runs, a huge roll of paper is substituted). If printing on both sides is desired, the ink must dry before the second side can be printed (although some presses can do two sides at once).

Anyway, it should be obvious that all sorts of things can go wrong with this process. The pressman can neglect to discard his test sheets. Moisture can condense into the ink and

cause spotting. The press can grab two sheets of paper at once (which will result in blank spaces). A blob of ink can spatter onto the final pages. The pages can smear if they are not allowed to dry properly before being sent to the next step. Good quality control can reduce these errors, but cannot totally eliminate them.

   • After the insides of a book are printed and have dried, they are sent to the bindery, where the printed sheets are folded, arranged in the proper order, cut to the proper size and bound into a cover (which has been printed separately). There is ample opportunity for things to go wrong here, too. Sheets can be folded improperly (in which case the pages in the final book will be out of sequence). Each sheet is folded several times to form a sub-unit of a book called a signature. Several signatures are stacked together and bound into a book—and if a signature is duplicated or left our entirely, you end up with a book with a strange page progression. Signatures can be bound upside-down, or in the wrong sequence, or (in extreme cases) signatures from another book entirely can be inserted. Covers can be fastened in place with inadequate glue, or it could be improperly formulated (which results in the cover falling off eventually).

   Obviously, none of these things can be caught in the blueline stage. Reputable printers will strive to avoid such things happening, and generally do a pretty good job, but a certain percentage of books will be bad. If that percentage is too large, the printer can be required to replace the faulty product, but this takes time and is of small comfort to a company with customers demanding product. Normally, a few bad books out of several thousand are just one of the costs of doing business.

   Of course, even if everything goes perfectly at the printer, the books still have to get from the printer to your warehouse. **GDW** once received a shipment of several skids of books. Each skid contained a couple of dozen corrugated cardboard cartons of books, all piled carefully on the skid and wrapped securely in protective plastic wrap and metal straps to hold them on the wooden pallet. One of the skids, however, had two large holes in the side, about four feet off the ground, where the prongs of a forklift had been driven into the cartons.*

   And then consider the problems of storage—heat and moisture are both bad for paper products. Insects (like termites or ants) love paper. And so on, ad infinitum . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Mr. Murphy was an optimist.

Jul 31, 2000, I Look Like What?

   One of the advantages of radio theater over television is that each listener can create a different mental image of the action (advertiser-turned-comedian Stan Freberg likes to demonstrate this from time to time on public radio and in his comedy albums—"**Let's See Them Do That on Television**"). Likewise, part of the fun of roleplaying is the images it brings to mind. Most people have a pretty good idea of what their characters look like, in general, at least.

   I (like most gamers, I think) imagine my characters to be sort of idealized versions of myself, and I tend to form mental pictures of other PCs based on the people who play them.

   Dealing with people by e-mail (and snail-mail, in days past), one develops mental images of them as well, based on their character as expressed in the medium in question. It is a common experience, when meeting someone face-to-face for the first time after a long period of electronic interchange, to compare the visualization with the reality. Many people

find their images do not match reality. I am often told by people I meet under these circumstances that I do not fit their imagined picture of me. When I ask how I differ, I do not get a consistent answer, but this is not at all unusual.

A common misconception that persists to the present day is that Loren Wiseman is female. Loren (like Jackie, Jesse, Kelly, Sean, Pat, and a host of other names) is a moniker that can be applied to both sexes (although the female version is usually spelled Lauren—in all my years, I have run into maybe a dozen Lorens besides myself,* and only one of them was female), so some confusion is inevitable. It is not just gamers; the world in general seems to have the same problem occasionally. I get letters addressed to "Ms/Miss Loren Wiseman" from time to time, and telemarketers often call to ask for "Ms. Wiseman," and are sometimes confused when told there is no such person. When such people meet me in person, there can be a short period of confusion (for those of you who don't know, I'm male, 6' 3" tall, and currently 275 pounds), but most of them adjust immediately. There was, however, one person who didn't:

At a convention (I don't remember which one), I was in the **GDW** booth when a fuming fan approached Frank Chadwick. The fan announced (using considerable profanity which I will not repeat) that he was dissatisfied with Ms. Wiseman's performance as editor of the print **JTAS** and demanded a meeting with her (the word he used is properly applied to female canines). Frank pointed at me. The fan read my badge, looked at my face, turned three shades of purple and fled the scene. I didn't catch his name, but I never saw him again. I found it an interesting commentary on his character that he was ready to severely criticize a woman he had never met, but fled like a scalded rabbit when he found I was a man. Perhaps his gender misperception was too embarrassing.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of my quirks when traveling is to check local phone books for "Loren Wiseman" entries. With the advent of the Internet, I do phone/address searches periodically as well. So far, I have not found another Loren K. Wiseman—I seem to be the only one. It is rather an interesting feeling. There are a number of Loren Weissmans, and one Lauren Wiseman, but no precise matches. If the readership knows of another, please let me know where he/she can be found—I have no intention of making contact, but I am curious to know of their existence.

Aug 07, 2000, Miniatures

This week, I thought I'd deal with a few miniatures-related topics. As you probably know by now, **SJ Games** has established a miniatures division, headed up by Richard Kerr. Initially, we'll be doing Ogre minis, but we are discussing a **Traveller** miniatures license with Marc Miller's **Far Future Enterprises,** and I've begun some preliminary thinking on what a miniatures line for **Traveller** should contain.

I realize that minis are not everyone's cup of tea, but that can be said about a number of **Traveller**-related issues (not everyone is thrilled by the prospect of reviewing stellar characteristics for every world in the Third Imperium, for example). As long as a sizable number of fans are interested, it is worth doing, even if it doesn't appeal to 100 percent of them. **Traveller** is a game of such enormous scope that it can (and does) incorporate fans with dissimilar, almost opposing interests.

People who buy miniatures are a disparate lot. Some buy figures because they like to paint them (and never use them in their games); some like to customize and modify

commercial figures into portraits of their characters; some use them to help visualize the action ("OK, line up the figs according to how you are going through the door."). We have to take the diverse interests of the customer base into account when planning our miniatures releases—the leading contenders right now are starships and adventurers, although other items may follow, depending on how well things go. We are still trying to decide on scales, but right now it looks like the adventurer figures will be 25/28mm for a variety of reasons. Over the next few months, I'll be looking for consumer input on a variety of things as we try to get a feel for the market and for what we will need to produce. Simple economics dictate that we cannot do everything at once—like everyone on the planet, we have limited resources. We need to concentrate, initially at least, on those items with high demand—which means things like the "Vargr Playing Poker" diorama will have to wait a while.

Finally, let me say a few words about **Cardboard Heroes**. The fact that we are doing metal miniatures does not preclude us from releasing **Traveller Cardboard Heroes.** These too, are on the "to do" list.*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* When I first got this job, Steve took me to dinner and we discussed the line. I was given a number of general instructions, one of which was "Keep **Traveller Cardboard Heroes** in mind," and another was "Find a way to make **Triplanetary** economically feasible to produce." There were others as well, but there will be a time and a place to mention those—and this isn't it.

Aug 14, 2000, "Real" Traveller

I touched briefly on this topic last week, and it occurred to me afterward that I could say more on the subject, so here goes. Years ago, I wrote an editorial in the paper version of **JTAS*** that touched on some suggestions concerning the magazine's content. It seems that a number of readers felt I was devoting too much space to ancillary subjects, and not publishing enough articles on what **Traveller** was really about. What struck me at the time (and still does) is that no two readers could completely agree on what the real **Traveller** was. Each letter suggested a different emphasis, and most of them were diametrically opposed to each other. Then, as now, the fans were divided into broad groups, and those groups haven't changed much in the decade-and-a-half since I wrote the editorial. They can be divided into three main groups (each with numerous subdivisions and considerable overlap): wargamers, rolegamers, and gearheads.

Roleplaying games grew out of wargames, and **Traveller** is no exception. The "wargaming faction" of **Traveller** revels in gunfights, skirmish actions, and larger combats with ground troops and starships. Titles such as **Snapshot, Mayday, Azhanti High Lightning, Fifth Frontier War, Striker, Invasion Earth,** and **Brilliant Lances** were created to appeal to this group. Even the RPG aspects of **Traveller** were militarized in titles like **Mercenary** and **High Guard**. The people who made up **GDW's** staff were (and still are) wargamers,** and most of our games had a military slant to them. Many campaigns merged roleplaying and military aspects, where the main characters were high-level military commanders. **Trillion Credit Squadron** encouraged this sort of thing.

The second faction of **Traveller** are the roleplayers (or "rolegamers," as we used to call them). Some of these people run low-level adventure campaigns, involving a few characters interacting with the universe on a personal level, but a sizable number of people run games where the characters own merchant empires or administer worlds (one of the early

playtesters of **Traveller** asked, "Can I start as boss of a whole planet?"). Products such as **Merchant Prince, The Traveller Adventure, Tarsus,** and **Beltstrike** were created with this group in mind.

The third faction has always been present, but only recently have they given themselves the name "gearhead." **Traveller** always had design sequences of varying complexity for things ranging from personal weapons to star systems. A sizable portion of our fans delight in tinkering with the mechanics of these systems, and there are many people who do nothing but create vehicles, starships, worlds, and star systems (it is one of the ways to play **Traveller** solitaire). The invention of the computer spreadsheet caused this group to grow by several orders of magnitude. The two versions of **Fire, Fusion, and Steel** are the "holy books" of this particular faction, but **Scouts, World Tamers' Handbook, GT: Far Trader,** and **GT: First In** were produced for them.

The universe of **Traveller** is vast—and this is one of its greatest strengths, and the reason it is still going strong after 20+ years. No part of it is any more (or any less) "the real **Traveller**" than any other.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'd provide the issue number, but I don't feel like taking the five minutes it would take for me to look it up, and it is really not important anyway—anybody who is truly interested in knowing, send me an e-mail.

** Personally, I think if all war were restricted to the tabletop, the world would be better off. Wargamers need no more wars—the source material provided by history is more than ample.

Aug 21, 2000, Two Things 2000

This week, I'm going to cover two totally unrelated topics, the first inspired by Chris Thrash's article (**Traveller 3D**), and the second the result of a post on one of the discussion boards a few days ago.

First, another confession: I am pretty much incompetent at higher math. I took algebra, geometry, and physics courses in high school, but I avoided trig and calculus (reasoning that as a historian, I would never need them—I was correct, although there are branches of historical study that use statistics and probability). I avoided all association with math after that. I am capable of basic four-function calculations, but anything more advanced leaves me puzzled and confused.* Chris' article (which features words like "*cuboctahedron,*" and "*rhombic dodecahedron*") is right on the edge of comprehensibility for me—this is not a language I speak. At **GDW,** Marc, Rich, and Frank all had greater facility with numbers than I (John Harshman had attended Cal-Tech**).

Second, I thought a little more detail about my earliest universe might interest people, if only from a historical perspective.

I've mentioned this briefly before—for the original **Traveller** playtest, I created a small campaign I called "**Starwell**" (inspired by Panshin's novel of the same name). Basically, the campaign featured two small (by Third Imperium standards) interstellar states separated by a rift. This rift could be crossed only at a single point, which was called **Starwell. Starwell** was independent, and remained so because neither side could allow the other to have so valuable an asset (and it was too valuable to the economies of both states to risk destroying it in a war). **Starwell** was conceived as a kind of Casablanca where adventures started, and worked fairly well—there was a bar there called Hunter's, which served as a kind of hiring

hall for starship crew members.

A unique factor of the campaign was my variant on the way jumps worked (this was before the rules for them were finalized). Jump routes were like wormholes or gates, connecting two fixed points. You always came out in the same place in your destination system (more or less—I implemented some randomness to make ambushes tougher). Jump routes were of different lengths (1-6) and the normal rules about fuel and jump tapes applied, but if there was no jump route to a particular place, the only way to get there was STL. There were several places along the rift that were only a few parsecs apart, but no jump routes connected them. Most of the routes were common knowledge, and jump tapes for them could be had almost anywhere. A few routes (or, more properly, the tapes for those routes) were closely guarded secrets. Routes could be discovered, but only by herculean efforts (or by blind luck), and entering a jump route without a tape was a very risky proposition. (Of course, you could make a tape by successfully traveling a route, but you had to do it several times for ultimate accuracy.) Most of the time, misjumps were simply failed jumps – you lost the fuel and the week's time, but never went anywhere—but occasionally they resulted in the disappearance of the ship (nothing in between). In this campaign, normal mercantile operations were fairly safe, but any kind of exploration was very risky.

This created a few interesting situations. I had several worlds with no known jump connections, and these were a source of much speculation by the merchant concerns of both empires. Industrial espionage (primarily seeking rare jump tapes) was rampant. Several groups were searching intensively for a new route across the rift (which narrowed to two parsecs in several places), but this action was opposed by the family that controlled **Starwell** (the Hortelez family, for those who are interested—can you guess the name of their corporation?). There was room for exploration (the terra incognita of the unconnected worlds), if you were willing to take the risks.

There was a lot more in-system activity than in a more conventional campaign—adventurers tended to be less wide- ranging in their travels. Not every place had a habitable world, but settlement tended to follow the jump routes, so there were a lot of starports and settlements in less-than-ideal locations.

I'm not sure this system would work on a large-scale background such as the Third Imperium—it would certainly mutate just about everything beyond recognition. On the other hand, it had one major advantage: it allowed for a frontier feeling in the midst of a long settled area.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I am not totally dysfunctional, however—I can balance my checkbook, and I do my own taxes, and I can calculate a tip in my head without too much effort. I have (or had, at one time) a working knowledge of probabilities (most gamers do—that portion of my brain is, I fear, heavily corroded from age). I got through my high school math courses without recourse to electronic calculators or computer spreadsheets. I scored higher than 98% of my peers on the SATs, but that is more a function of my facility with standardized tests than any skill with mathematics. My father, however, could extract square roots in his head, and disdained electronic calculators for minor things like tax returns. I inherited none of these talents (but I still have all my hair, so I guess that comes out even).

** It was from him I learned that Cal-Tech had a doctoral program in history. When I discovered this, I wondered who would go to Cal-Tech for a history degree? What would be a suitable topic for a dissertation—a time machine?

Aug 28, 2000, Old Stuff

I recently received about 900 pounds of stuff from my storage locker.* The boxes were mostly books (books make up 90% of possessions—I don't think I'm alone in that). Some of the boxes, however, contained other things, including a few odd bits from the **GDW** office. I have several games salvaged from the **GDW** reference library (with **GDW Library** stamped on every 10th page in red ink), a file folder containing the contents of my office cork board (mostly cartoons and newspaper clippings I thought were of enduring significance), some photographs, and other odds and ends.

What interested me most was how much things have changed in the last five or ten years. I found some old production leftovers from **GDW** (transparencies for game artwork, a pasteup or two, some assorted negatives and PMTs,** and a huge pile of floppies of assorted sizes and densities). Some of the material has sentimental value to me, and I'll be sending the rest of it to people I think will find more sentiment in it than I do. One thing that struck me as I was going through the cartons was how much work used to go into preparing a page of text or a cover for the printer in the days before desktop computers, DTP programs, and scanners. I think the feeling I got as I looked at those things was similar to someone 20 or 30 years ago looking over a pile of PMTs, rubylith, and keyline pasteup equipment, remembering what it was like to do a book with a Linotype and copper plate halftone engravings.

The odd thing about all of this archaic material is that some of it dates from the period 1989-1991, when **GDW** was riding high on the money generated by sales of the **Gulf War Factbook** (which was probably our all-time best-selling single book, and the only **GDW** product to make the **NYT Best-Seller** List). We could afford to purchase state-of-the-art production equipment, and did so, across the board. Every designer got a new, top-of-the-line computer system, and graphics and production were fitted out with all sorts of wonderful stuff of which they had previously only been able to dream.

All of it was archaic by 1993. The technology that replaced it is hopelessly obsolete, and the tech that replaced that is now considered barely adequate for simple duties. Some of the files are so old that they are barely readable by current versions of the software (**GDW** used PageMaker for layout and MS Word for word processing—both of these are still around, but have trouble dealing with files produced by their ancestors). I have a machine that will accept 5-1/4" floppies, but it is in Illinois. For the moment, it is as inaccessible to me as if it were written in cuneiform.

I am not alone in this, I understand—evidently there are mountains of material at the census bureau that is on obsolete media. Some of the older formats are unreadable, and some of them require machines that aren't available any more, and haven't even been manufactured in more than two decades. **The Smithsonian** and the **Library of Congress** have similar problems, I am told, as does almost every university library in the world.

I'd like to be able to access some of the old material. Much of it eventually appeared in print, but I am fairly certain several of the "back-burner" projects I have worked on over the years are on those discs somewhere—it would be nice to see that content again. I probably will eventually, but in the meantime, I can only wait and hope the storage facility doesn't burn down . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For those of you who don't know, when I moved to Austin, I could not afford to move all of my possessions at once, so I left most of my stuff in a storage locker back in Illinois.

I had a plan—each box was carefully numbered, and I kept a general list of what each box contained. The plan was to have a friend ship me cartons in the order I needed them. Like most plans, however, mine did not survive contact with reality. The last week or so was total chaos: I was forced to abandon much of my furniture (most of which was no great loss), the last few cartons were packed by randomly shoveling things into them, and (last but not least) I left my carefully-prepared inventory behind. I have been receiving a box or two every week, and each time it is like Christmas—I have no idea what the boxes will contain. Recently, we decided to try a truck shipment, so I got a skidload of the heaviest stuff shipped to me (and despite the heroic efforts of two of my co-workers to help me carry the cartons up three flights of stairs, my back is still bothering me several days later).

** I'm not sure, but I think this stands for "photomechanical transfer," a slick-surfaced print of a black & white image, with no screens or shades of gray.

Sep 04, 2000, A Few Fans

My original notion for this essay was to call it something like When Fans Attack! but upon reflection, I couldn't think of a single encounter with a fan where I was physically afraid. Some of this, of course, has to do with my size and appearance (I'm 6' 3" and 270 pounds), but mostly it is because **Traveller** fans are more firmly grounded in civility than some others I could name. I have compared "fan stories" with other game industry professionals, and with authors (including Larry Bond, Tom Clancy, and Mike Stackpole), and mine are amazingly well-behaved.* I have never encountered anything resembling a dangerous fan, but I have run into a few who were annoying, and many who were outright funny. Before I reminisce about them, however, let me say once again that the vast majority of **Traveller** fans (indeed, of gaming fans in general) are intelligent and well-behaved, and I am overjoyed to have had a part in creating something that can inspire such intense loyalty.

I met all of these gentlemen (although the proportion of female gamers has increased radically in the 20+ years I've been in the business, gamers are still primarily male) at gaming conventions, and all of them were while I was with **GDW, Inc**. I have encountered fans over the phone, in letters, in various on-line fora, and in e-mail. One even showed up, unannounced, on my doorstep (I declined to see him, and asked that he visit me at work). Nothing can compare, however, to a face-to-face encounter at a convention.

MEGO: MEGO is an acronym for My Eyes Glaze Over, and refers to my reaction to the type of fan who spends hours (at least, it seems like hours) describing every detail of his current character (including the die rolls during character creation), his character's custom-designed 500,000-ton ship, his character's 23 sidekicks (again, with a full blow-by-blow of their creation), and the 16 game/years worth of adventures they've had. Fans like this are the reason the button "Excuse me, I have to go scream now . . ." was created.

The Critic: Although I have run into several people like him over the years, no one ever equaled the critic at his particular form of fandom. This man became a legend among industry professionals (GDW was not the only company he blessed with his presence). Every year, for nearly a decade, the Critic would arrive at our booth and expound (at great length) on the flaws, failings, and weaknesses of our latest products—his primary complaint seemed to be that the game we produced was not the one he would have designed. He never bought anything while I was around, but he always had several shopping bags full of games (many of them ours) so he was actually a customer. No one ever saw him actually play a game, and he seemed to have no friends (at least I never heard anyone admit to being his friend). He stopped attending shows about 1988, and I've never seen him since.

Mr. Surly: This is not a single individual, but a general type. "Surlies" love the game, but hate the company and the designers that produce it. They arrive at the booth, demand

two or three copies of each new product in a given game line, pay in cash, and leave, grumbling and growling all the while. They are not interested in conversation beyond that necessary to complete the transaction, and they become visibly angry at any attempt at polite discourse. These people are a mystery to me, but they can be found among wargamers (both board gamers and miniatures gamers) as well as roleplayers. I am told they exist in other fandoms outside gaming.

Mr. "I'm Not Worthy": Again, this is a general type of fan. They are so overwhelmed to find themselves in the presence of the people who create the thing they love that they become almost catatonic. Most people have a little nervousness when they encounter someone they consider famous (I'm subject to it myself), but a few people never get over it. These are the people who will hang around for a long time, working up the nerve to approach you. When the moment finally arrives, they are flustered and nervous, and can't assemble a coherent sentence. I do my best to put these people at ease, but I am not always successful.

Gamer Funk: This is not an individual, but a condition that seems to afflict an inordinate number of individuals at gaming conventions. It is a result of long hours spent in poorly air-conditioned rooms, packed full of gamers who have overindulged in spicy foods and lengthy gaming sessions, and under-indulged in things like bathing and dental hygiene. I remember one fellow in particular who was not especially hard on the nose, but had about a week's worth of stubble. His was not unusual in and of itself, but the coverage was phenomenal. The man's beard had the color and consistency of a fungal growth, and completely covered his entire face and neck. It started about 1/2" below his eyes, and extended all the way down over his collarbones and continued on to his chest, without any change in color or density. He looked like a walking lump of Spanish moss.

Over the years, fans like these have been vastly outnumbered by the polite, reasonably clean type who ask coherent questions, bring soft drinks to me when I can't leave the booth, and ask if I would autograph their well-thumbed and heavily-used game books.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Steve Jackson, for example, has some stories that'll curl you hair—such as the gentleman who wrote him suggesting several reasons why he would be well-advised to worship a paint-by-number portrait of Robin Hood!

Sep 11, 2000, Forbidden Knowledge

Psionics occupy an interesting position in the **Traveller** universe. We never created a rigorous physical explanation for psionic talents, but Marc decided early in the design process that an SF game should deal with them. We did not take inspiration from any particular author, but several had dealt with the subject in detail, and we found the works of Alfred Bester and Larry Niven particularly inspirational.* We worked out several implications of widespread psi abilities, and discussed the question at length. The rules we finally decided upon can easily support several different levels of psionic availability—we decided that psi talents remained dormant until the character received proper training.

We did not want psionics to upset game balance, which meant that we needed some mechanism in the game background to counteract the considerable advantage psi talents would give characters. A society where psionic abilities were widespread would be radically different from that of the game's audience, and this would be at odds with the overall "feel" Marc wanted for the game. Widespread telepathy would mean radical changes in the concept of personal privacy. Widespread teleportation would make a mockery of physical

security. Tele- and pyrokinesis would certainly complicate law enforcement, among other things. All of these things get caught up in questions of ethics and morality—just how honest would everyone be if locks were nonexistent? How common would criminal and antisocial acts (and thoughts) be if they could be detected in early childhood?

We finally decided that psi powers would be rare but not unknown, to allow characters some chance of having them. At the same time, we decided to shape the main Imperial culture so that those with psi talents were feared and disliked by the populace as a whole. We arranged things so that the Imperial government, while publicly suppressing psionics, at the same time made covert use of them. This provided an interesting dichotomy, and would enable referees to involve the Imperial government or not as they saw fit. Any player who decided to make psionics a major factor in his character would need to exercise caution to avoid public persecution—and might draw Imperial attention as well.

We did not abandon the work we had done on creating a psi-based society, however. Much of it was eventually incorporated into the Zhodani, and whether that society is paradise or purgatory is still a matter of considerable debate among **Traveller** fans. **GDW**'s approach was to try to present both views and let individual GMs decide (something we tried to do for much of the game).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I think I remarked once that it would be difficult to find an SF concept that Larry Niven hasn't written about.

Sep 18, 2000, The Test of Time, Part II

One of my first editorials concerned a movie I hadn't seen in many years (**The Long Ships**) and my observation that it had not stood the test of time particularly well. I drew parallels to some of my early writing for **Traveller**, and how some of them hadn't held up especially well, either. I recently saw another couple of films, and I was reminded of that editorial.

First came **The Caine Mutiny**, which was nominated for several academy awards—best actor, best supporting actor, and best special effects, among others. If you've never seen it, do so soon; it has one of Bogart's most riveting performances, and is a very good drama, provided you ignore the cheesy romance subplot that has nothing to do with the rest of the film. The special-effects nomination was for the typhoon scene, which was pretty sophisticated model work for its day, but which seems more than a little dated now. It makes no difference in the final analysis, however, because the movie is timeless—it is as good now as it ever was.

Anyway, when I was watching the film again recently (courtesy of a nationwide video-rental chain), I was struck by a comparison with another movie—not, as you might expect, **A Perfect Storm**, but **The Matrix**.

The Matrix? Why that particular film? Because **The Matrix** is a special-effects extravaganza, a treat to watch simply for the FX sequences, which are state of the art—just like **The Caine Mutiny**'s typhoon was 40 years ago. The thought struck me that 40 years from now (if not sooner), movie buffs will find **The Matrix** just as dated (some of the schticks are showing up in annoying family-restaurant commercials, which I offer as evidence that they are about to be declared trite and derivative).

The second film is more recent: **The Big Fix**. This one features Richard Dreyfuss as a "baby-boomer" activist turned private detective as the activism of the late '60s turned into

the . . . well, whatever the late '70s were. This movie is not a special-effects tour-de-force, but the script is witty, the plot is fast-paced, and the characters are delightful (the screenplay is by Roger Simon, adapted from his novel; see the movie, then read the book(s)—Simon wrote several). What doesn't hold up well in this movie is the ambiance. The clothing and hairstyles look ludicrous to us now (actually, they looked pretty silly back then, now that I think about it). The background music to the car chase scene is laughable, seeming more suited to a **Saturday Night Live** parody of **Shaft.** Despite these minor flaws, however, the plot holds up very well, even if some of the cultural references are becoming more obscure with the passage of time (aging antiwar activists, pre-Watergate politicians, and strange California self-improvement fads). The characterization is great—and Dreyfuss' character is interesting because of both the actor's talent and the quality of the screenplay. This film is not Academy-Award material, but it is well worth a couple of dollars' rental fee. You could do a lot worse.

The Big Fix is especially relevant to **Traveller** because it came out at about the same time, give or take a year or two. Some of the aspects of the Third Imperium seem odd to the modern SF fan (just as **The Big Fix** seems odd to me now), but I think the key thing about **Traveller** is this: **Traveller** is space opera, with all the optimism and sense of wonder and high hopes for the future that that phrase brings to mind. **Traveller** is about all the good things science and technology promise us for the future. It is not about existential angst and brooding pessimism (not that those don't have their place—in other games). **Traveller** says the future is a pretty good place to be headed to.

Sep 25, 2000, Magic?

In the early days of RPGs, someone once remarked, "Magic and its uses denies technology and its uses." It has been so long that I forget why that had come up—I think it was someone trying to work out physical explanations for assorted magical spells. John Harshman and I spent considerable time discussing the ramifications of a world where large fire-breathing lizards could fly, but most of that was for our own amusement—we weren't trying to formulate a unified field theory of fantasy worlds. I think it is fairly clear which side of the question most **Traveller** fans come down on—most of them (I'm pretty sure) support Arthur C. Clarke's contention that sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

Frankly, I don't think it has to be all that advanced. One of the earliest known "sorcerers" is an Egyptian named Dedi (I think—I'm writing this from memory, so don't quote me) who used to impress the pharaoh by cutting the head off a duck and restoring it (the duck survived the episode, of course—otherwise there's not much of a trick to it, is there?). One of my occasional hobbies is studying the technology of stage magic—learning how a particular trick is done* and trying to figure out what the limiting technology might be, and how far back in time the trick could have been accomplished.

The point of my thoughts today, however, is how many people (one might even say, the majority) view technology. One of my favorite books when I was growing up was **The Way Things Work,** which was intended to show bright youngsters (such as myself) the mechanical principles behind all sorts of everyday items—electrical switches, plumbing fixtures, transformers, internal combustion engines, carburetors, and the like. I was curious to know the details behind such things, and it was a mystery to me why my friends didn't much care how a 3-way light bulb worked.

During WW II, when the US was trying to separate usable quantities of fissionable material, the suggestion was made to train thousands of technicians in the operation of the magnetic separation process, a course of action that would have taken years.** What

they ended up doing was putting 18-year-old women through a two-week course in . . . dial watching (for lack of a better term). The operators had no clue what they were doing—they were simply trained to watch a series of dials and when the needle on one went too far one way, they were instructed to turn a particular dial little by little until it went back. High-school girls with two weeks of training were doing what it had taken a Ph.D. to accomplish only a year before—and none of them could tell an isotope from a cabbage.

People drive cars without knowing what happens under the hood; they use computers while ignorant of the machine's internal operations (I have only the vaguest inkling of what's going on inside the beige box that's sitting in front of me now); they cook meals in microwave ovens by a process that might as well involve benevolent spirits and magic spells. It is not at all unrealistic, therefore, that people answer the question "How does the jump drive work?" with " Well, you push this big red button that says Engage Jump . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This is a lot simpler than it sounds—simply getting a catalog from **Abbot's** will start you down the road—they'll sell you the secrets of hundreds of tricks and all it will cost you is money. I learned much simply by considering three simple items I found in the first few pages: palming fluid, flesh-colored paint, and "invisible" thread.

** Forgive me if I skip over a few things—I am writing this without references, and it has been 10 years since I read anything on this subject.

Oct 03, 2000, The Rain in Spain (or Wherever)

Those of us at **GDW**, like almost every close-knit group, had catch phrases. These would pop up during discussions and would serve as a kind of conversational shorthand—the catch phrase carried a special meaning for us, and was shorter than repeating the concept the phrase represented, which could get complicated sometimes.

An example is the phrase "It was raining on the planet Mongo." I don't remember where this originated, but I think it was from some **Flash Gordon** short story that Marc or Frank had read at one time. What the phrase meant in **GDW** was that most things were much more complicated than the simple labels we normally attach to them. Specifically, it was a reminder that uniform planet labels were unrealistic and should be avoided wherever possible. Ice planet,* jungle planet, desert planet—all are oversimplifications. More generally, it meant that we should remember that we were dealing with fully-developed ecosystems, and that there was never going to be room to properly detail or describe any world.

That said, I'd be the first to point out that the designers and developers at **GDW** occasionally failed to follow our own advice. It is too easy to fall into simple labels for things like worlds or cultures, mainly because that is the way our minds are wired. Our ancestors used to be hunters, and we classify things rapidly so we can identify and deal with them (take the time to study each situation in detail, and you end up removed from the gene pool). We tend to do our classifications using pre-made labels—stereotypes. We have them for people, places, cultures, and organizations.

The pressures on GMs are similar; they have limited time to convey a complicated situation to their players, who are naturally more interested in playing than listening to a detailed description of whatever they've just encountered. This is the reason so many things in **Traveller** are described by calling upon literary similes. This world is like Arakeen in **Dune**, this race is like the Chanur/Kzinti/puppeteers, the captain is like Kirk/Picard/Janeway/Falkenberg, and so on. It puts things in perspective rapidly, which saves time.

We just need to remember that the problem with this method comes when we decide that our pre-existing compartments are the only ones possible, and we take the general classification too literally.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Speaking of ice planets, check out **Antarctica**, by Kim Stanley Robinson. If you liked his [insert color here] Mars novels, you'll love this one.

Oct 09, 2000, Amber Zone—Retrospective

From time to time, we run old articles from past (print) issues of **JTAS**, and I thought I'd take the opportunity to make a few comments in conjunction with the one I've chosen for this week. Hopefully the reminiscence will prove instructive. Readers may wish to go to the article and read it over before continuing (or call it up in a separate window, if your computer allows). Otherwise, reading my comments here may ruin some of the suspense.

This is one of the examples of my early writing that I am a little embarrassed to look at these days. It is not as bad as some things I did back then, but I like to think I have improved since that time. The plot is quite simple (that was the whole idea behind the Amber Zone article type to begin with), but is still sound. My basic problem with the piece is that it is a little cliched and tends to assume that the characters aren't all that bright—a mysterious woman hands them a package to be taken to another planet, no questions asked—I'd boo that one off the screen if I saw it in a theater. Any RPG player worth his dice bag knows that you should examine every parcel placed in your care—with a scanning electron microscope, if possible.

Gearheads will have some complaints with the technical details, also. A microdot hidden inside a hollowed-out coin . . . how seventies! At the very least, the information should be micro-etched into the surface of the coin, preferably in some super-secret cipher that a computer tech will find a slight challenge to decode.* Fortunately, none of these details are important to the main plot, which is how the adventurers interact and react when they discover they have stumbled across an espionage ring, and could end up in deep trouble with the authorities.

The plot is set during the Fifth Frontier war but little really hinges on that—a spy ring can operate in peace as well as war. The main function of the war is to place restrictions on normal parcel shipments, forcing the woman to seek a private carrier for her special package. Any GM worth his screen should be able to figure out several alternatives that will accomplish the same thing.

Adapting the adventure to **GURPS Traveller** will not be hard. The text specifies a couple of die rolls to see if the adventurers notice something out of the ordinary—GURPS GMs should adapt the suggested die rolls in the article to whatever Sense rolls they feel are appropriate under the circumstances.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* An alternative would be for the "real" data to be embedded in the plastic case the coin is carried in, with the microdot serving as a red herring.

Oct 16, 2000, A New Game?

First off, for those of you who don't get my reference to Philadelphia in the teaser for the **Salvage Rights Amber Zone** this week, I meant it to call up images of **The Philadelphia Experiment**.*

For those of you who haven't heard, artist Jesse DeGraff (who has done covers and interior art for many **GURPS Traveller** products) received some injuries in a kitchen fire recently. He reports he is 99% recovered, and has posted some photos of the scene and a full account of the adventure on his Web site. I am overjoyed that Jesse was not injured more seriously, and the property damage was limited to a few readily replaceable items.

There are several lessons for all of us in this, I think. We forget sometimes the dangers represented by the activities of everyday life, and how thin the line between normality and disaster. It is easy to get complacent, but the margin for error is slim when you are dealing with fire—there is so much potential for serious damage or death from a moment's carelessness or bad luck. Don't leave cooking food unattended, especially anything involving grease, oil, or fat. Have a fire extinguisher near your stove (and don't keep it on the wall where you have to reach across a burning pan to get at it).

Experts in emergency management believe that one way to react better in an emergency is to rehearse what you will do in a given situation and play out several alternatives. Schools have fire drills, and fire safety experts teach that families should have them, also. The little card on an airliner suggests that you should work out where the emergency exits are and imagine yourself finding your way to them. Military training is predicated on the fact that certain actions must be rehearsed until they become second nature.

Say . . .

Doesn't all this sound familiar? How about instead of running a simulated gunfight on a spaceship, you game out a simulated emergency in your own house? The local fire department will be happy to provide you information on the proper ways to react in a fire. Get some brochures and design a game . . . get your loved ones together, make up a deck plan, get some miniatures or counters or **Cardboard Heroes** miniatures and run some scenarios like "Escape from the Bedroom When the Corridor is Burning" or "The Stove's on Fire!". After the session is over, discuss what went wrong and what went right (throwing water on a grease fire is not a good idea . . . few people think of dumping a box of salt on a small fire to smother it, etc.). Again, talking to your local firefighters will give you lots of information on appropriate actions.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* No collection of high weirdness is complete without a copy of **The Philadelphia Experiment**, either the book that started it all, or the eminently forgettable movie (which is good for a few laughs at least).

Oct 23, 2000, A Terrible Burden

Things get a little slow on the **Traveller Mailing List*** from time to time, and sometimes the fan group there will leap upon the smallest thing and beat it to within an inch of its life. A recent example of this involved an offhand comment in the **GDW** product **Survival Margin**, which has Emperor Strephon making reference to the movie T**he Princess Bride**.** Strephon uses the quote "Have fun storming the castle!" in a diary entry, because Dave Nilsen (who wrote **Survival Margin**) is a great fan of the movie, and wanted to pay a tribute to the film. Someone on the **TML** made mention of the fact that Strephon must have

seen the movie, and I responded that it was one of the few classics from the Golden Age of 2D movies to survive the Long Night. Another person asked what other movies survived, and suggested that fans submit lists of the top 10 movies they would most like to see survive to the year 1120 Imperial. The floodgates were opened.

Over the next few days, practically every regular contributor to the **TML** posted a list of movies. Discussion ensued, and during this, one of the fans mentioned that the fact that some movies survived was now established as part of the **Traveller** "canon."

Wow.

An offhand remark made more than half in jest has now become part of the established **Traveller** game background. Not many people have thousands of fans hanging on their every word—it is an awesome and terrible burden I bear. I'll have to watch what I say—what if, in the wee hours of a weekend, I make mention that the official language of the Third Imperium changed to Urdu after the Fifth Frontier War? What if I decide that all Imperial nobles wear their underwear on the outside? That the favorite Imperial beverage has changed from *Tokaj essenzia* to chocolate milk with a slice of kiwi fruit floating in it?

Seriously, I do have to be careful what I say—sometimes when I make a joke, people take me seriously. (My smile is almost indistinguishable from my normal expression—the corners of my mouth turn up slightly. At **GDW**, John Harshman suggested I should carry a little red flag that I could wave when I was joking.)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For information on subscribing to this list, contact *traveller-owner@mpgn.com*

** **TPB** was written by my favorite screenwriter (William Goldman—who wrote the screenplays for **Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid**, **All the President's Men**, **Marathon Man**, **A Bridge Too Far**, and **Misery**, to name a few), and did not achieve great critical acclaim upon its release, although it has acquired a small cult following. It is a wonderful film, and well worth renting.

Oct 30, 2000, Happy Holidays

Halloween has become the second most fiscally lucrative holiday for the nation's storekeepers (after Christmas)—so I am told. People spend as much or more decorating their houses for Halloween as for Christmas—pumpkins, gourds, shocks of cornstalks, piles of straw, and miles of orange and black crepe paper. There are numerous reasons for this, but frankly, I think it is because most people like a chance to dress up in costumes,* party 'til the wee hours of the morning, and hack perfectly innocent pumpkins to shreds in an attempt to create folk art.

I once read an explanation of the derivation of the jack-o-lantern which said that it originated with druids in the Dark Ages, as part of the Celtic Samhain. The article went on to explain that the pumpkin, being a New World plant, was not available to the medieval Irish, so before its import, they used potatoes instead. I cannot quote the whole article, but I found it very entertaining. I was amused that the author used the terms "Druid," "Celt," and "Irish" interchangeably (I leave it to the reader to research the subtle differences). I found the concept that pumpkins were not available in the Middle Ages, but potatoes were, to be funny. I found the concept of hollowing out a potato, carving a face in it, and putting a candle inside to be ludicrous in the extreme. The author evidently believed that potatoes were native to Ireland (after all, everybody has heard of Irish potatoes). I'm not going to go into the rest of the notion—let's just say I believe (on the basis of what I admit is less than

conclusive evidence) that the custom of the jack-o-lantern originated in the Americas, and after the 1700s. But I'm having a terrible time figuring out how to make this relevant to **Traveller**, so I'm going to punt.

An advanced culture is still going to have its superstitions. For the longest time, it was felt that education and advanced technology would eliminate superstition; in the world of the future, mutant clovers are no more (and no less) than any other variety, ladders can be walked under, cracks stepped on, and mirrors shattered with impunity. Interestingly, this has not been the case. Not only are the old beliefs still with us (just last week, a friend of mine expressed concern upon breaking a mirror, and I have a sister-in-law who will not light three candles on the same match), but new ones occasionally arise. People fervently believe that if you find a penny heads-up in the "Take a Penny" tray, you should use it on your scratch-and-win lottery ticket (which is probably the most recent superstition I've encountered). **Traveller** created several (the notion of jump-dimming, for example), and I'm sure individual fans have made many others. There seems to be something about the makeup of our brains that leads us to this sort of thing, and the passage of a few thousand years is unlikely to change that.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I always wondered what the people who normally wear blue hair and pierced elbows do on Halloween—do they rent business suits and evening gowns?

The last time I wore a costume was when I was selling computers for a national office-supply store chain. The manager decided it would be nice if the store had a contest where the employees would wear their costumes on the sales floor. One of the cashiers dressed as a butterfly, another as a cheerleader. There were numerous hoboes, and the assistant manager came as a biker. I borrowed some things from a friend and showed up in a reasonable facsimile of a Viking outfit, complete with embroidered tunic, spangenhelm, and a two-handed battleaxe (the tunic and trews were even in the official employee uniform colors, which I thought was a nice touch). The biker and I told people we were the new security guards. I won the contest hands down, even though I had to leave the axe in the employee lounge after the official contest photos were taken—something about frightening the customers ...

Nov 06, 2000, Contest

As I promised last week, we are holding a Name the **Cardboard Heroes** figures contest. Four **Cardboard Heroes** miniatures are illustrated with this editorial. Send me an e-mail giving each of the four a name ("Number 1 is Egor, Number 2 is Sylvia hault-Davros," and so on), and supply your name and e-mail address. Please enter only once (although you may suggest as many names as you like for each of the four figures). Four weeks from today (on December 4, 2000), I will select one winner for each of the four and give each winning entrant a small **Traveller** memento from my own collection—a Cr10 note originally produced by **GDW** years ago as a promotional item. I reserve the right to reject any entry with or without cause, at my discretion. Winners will be notified by e-mail, and will be announced in the From the Editor for December 5, 2000. The winning names will be applied to the relevant **Cardboard Heroes** figures in an upcoming reprint, and will thus be immortalized for eternity (or at least until 2002).

Nov 6, 2000, More Assorted What-Have-You

Item the First: As I suspected, most of the mail responding to last issue's editorial dealt with my comments on the origin of the jack-o-lantern rather than the notion of superstitions carrying over into the high-tech future. Numerous helpful readers sent me URLs on the origin of the jack-o-lantern (most of which seemed to be linked to each other in an almost incestuous manner), and one or two people responded with superstitions and customs that they had incorporated into their particular **Traveller** universe. This sort of thing is not important in a "big picture" sense, but it can add to the perceived realism of a game, making it much more enjoyable for all concerned.

Item the Second: In an attempt to be topical, I have included an article relating to an election (Amber Zone: Election). Tomorrow is a presidential election in this country, and the networks are tearing their hair out at the prospect that it will be too close to call (the ABC Evening News recently ran a short piece on the inability of their projection programs to function because the presidential election results will probably be within their margin of error). As for myself, I will once again save western civilization by careful exercise of my franchise Tuesday (I'm writing this Monday afternoon).

Item the Last: I have a small request for authors: please try to have an illustration in mind when you write an article. It can be anything from any **GURPS** book that looks reasonable, not just **GURPS Traveller.** This will make my life as editor simpler, and free up time for other **Traveller**-related pursuits.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I don't have a footnote this week, except for this one. Sorry.

Nov 13, 2000, Cardboard Vehicles?

Paul Lesack has thoughtfully provided a URL to a small selection of fold-up paper vehicles to use with miniatures, both of the metal and **Cardboard Heroes** varieties. They're PDFs, so you download them, re-size them as necessary, and print out as many as you like.

If we encourage Paul, maybe he can be persuaded to do more?

Then and Now

From time to time, we will be running "Classic" articles from issues of the print version of **JTAS**. This issue's **Work of Art** is an example, and also serves as the springboard for my musings this week.

Spoiler Warning: Those of you who have not read **Work of Art** and don't want to ruin what little surprise is present should go do so now before reading this column any further.

I've mentioned before how I sometimes cringe when I look at things I wrote many years ago. **Work of Art** is a little embarrassing (although it is not as bad as some items of similar vintage). The piece is what would now be called an adventure seed. It is basically an idea for a short adventure (and not a bad idea at that).

The basic idea has good potential—a valuable work of art has been stolen and the owners want it back, intact, within a set time-frame. The situation is complicated by the fact that the artwork has been created for an alien species (the K'kree, in this case), and can be damaged beyond repair if subjected to heat much above body temperature. A criminal organization (that stole the artwork on "commission" from a rival mercantile group on another world) is involved.

The original article has a few spelling errors and some grammatical clunkers I wish I could retroactively correct (printed matter cannot be corrected as easily and seamlessly as its online descendants). But the greatest problem with the piece is that it requires a huge input on the part of the referee (or GM, if you will—I've spent 20+ years using the term "referee" and old habits are hard to break). If I had it to do over again, here's what I'd probably do:

I would create two or three members of the **Fornice Merchants' Organization**, including motivations for each. Maybe one of them doesn't want to see the contract come through for some reason—perhaps he is being blackmailed?

I would create at least one bad guy for the adventurers to encounter, possibly more, and throw in a couple of cliche thugs and kneebusters for the GM to use when things get slow.

I would add a little more advice to the GM on how to run the thing. For example, it is implied that the group might locate the artwork but leave the waxes behind as "unimportant"—and thus fail in their mission.

I'd explain why the Fornice merchants couldn't go to the local police (there are any number of reasons why this might not be feasible).

I might add several alternatives for where the artwork is, who actually has it. It would be a good thing to have several contradictory facts and a few "red herrings" to keep people on their toes. A little flexibility never hurts, especially if some or all of the players have also read the adventure.

If I had lots of space, I might add more material on the K'kree trade delegation.

Still, at the time, this was a pretty good article, especially considering that I probably wrote it a few sentences at a time during intervals between the various other things I had to do back in those days.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Nov 20, 2000, Holidays Redux

Most holidays (in America at least) seem to be little more than an excuse to take a day off from work, eat far too much, and spend 8-12 hours in a digestive torpor in front of the television (normally watching a sporting event of some sort)*. People have been complaining about the creeping commercialization of holidays (Christmas especially) for many years—witness the movie **Miracle on 34th Street** and Dickens' **A Christmas Carol**.**

Not much has appeared in print about what holidays there are in the **Traveller** universe—and I don't want to get too specific on the subject. There is, of course, Holiday itself, the first day (001) of every year. We haven't said much about it, except that it is a traditional day for announcements, coronations, and the like, and is a day off work for almost everyone in the Imperium. It has been suggested that the reigning emperor's birthday is a holiday—but we have never said if this occurs on the actual natal day or some designated day. (I understand that in the U.K., Queen Elizabeth's birthday is not celebrated on the actual day of her birth—perhaps one of our U.K. subscribers can fill me in.) In any case, there have got to be other holidays, given the nature of Humaniti.

Religious holidays celebrate key events in the history of the religion in question (Easter, Yom Kippur, 'Eid-ul-Fitr, and many others). These are specific to a given religion, and are not always celebrated by those outside the religion unless they have become secularized, like Thanksgiving and (to an extent) Christmas. The question of religious holidays in the **Traveller** universe depends on what the dominant religions are. I prefer to leave this

sort of thing to the individual gaming group (even though we have established a couple of religions—the Virasins of Dlan and the Church of the Stellar Divinity). If the Imperium works anything like the real world, believers are allowed to take a certain number of days as holidays, but very few of these will be Imperium-wide holidays.

Secular holidays tend to commemorate historical events (Guy Fawkes Day, Cinco de Mayo), people (Kasimir Pulaski Day, Presidents' Day), or social and political ideas (Labor Day, Veteran's Day, assorted harvest festivals). For this reason, we can assume that Strephon's birthday is the subject of some sort of Imperium-wide celebration, and there may be a Cleon's Day or a general "Emperors' Day" celebration. There have been so many wars in the thousand-odd years of the Imperium that the calendar could be filled with commemorations of battles, massacres, victories, and armistices. If we ever do a formal calendar, it will be necessary to pick a few major ones from the huge list.

There will no doubt be service holidays—Navy Day, Army Day, and the birthdays of the Scouts and the Imperial Marines. A separate day devoted to those killed in the service of the Imperium undoubtedly exists. I doubt that there is an Imperium-wide Labor Day, however.

I wonder if the Imperium still has Halloween—and if so, what do the Hivers make of it?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Which, I have to admit, is an advance over the previous form of celebrating many holidays, which was for wandering bands of hooligans to extort food and drink from the local householders upon pain of vandalism. This is how Christmas (among other days) was once celebrated in colonial America, and parts of Great Britain. The present form of caroling/wassail is evidently descended from this practice (as is trick-or-treating, for that matter).

** The B&W 1947 version of **Miracle on 34th Street**, with Maureen O'Hara and Edmund Gwenn, is far superior to the 1994 version, despite the presence of Richard Attenborough in the latter. Of the movie versions of **A Christmas Carol**, I prefer the 1951 version with Alastair Sim. It is interesting to see the differences in what was considered "over-commercialization" then and now.

Nov 27, 2000, World Wide What?

A better title for this editorial might be "*The Internet Isn't What It's Cracked Up to Be, Part II*", but that's a little long. Anyway, I'm not sure how this all relates to **Traveller** but we'll see about that when I get to the end.

About 1988, I was introduced to something called the world-wide web by several means, including (but not limited to) discussions on several BBSs*, articles in computer magazines, and discussions on the old GEnie network. Since I was **GDW's** net representative, I received all of the e-mail from various fans concerning what one of them labeled as the "flavor of the month" in computing, and Frank Chadwick, **GDW**'s president and chief designer, asked me (as **GDW**'s net representative) to look into what this represented.

The "*powers that be*" at the time (a rather nebulous group that sometimes included me) had rather a bad experience with the Web right out of the gate—our first exposure to it was from a fan who wanted to "make **Traveller** more available" by OCRing all of our products and posting the documents for download.** Eventually, I was asked to look into establishing an official **GDW** Web page—this was about a week before we were served papers in a

lawsuit which was to take up most of my free time, and by the time that ended two years later, there always seemed to be something more important to do.

Had things gone differently, I would have set up a **GDW** web page and we would have undoubtedly moved into online retailing fairly quickly as the technology became available (indeed, **GDW** sold about a hundred copies of the **Desert Shield Factbook** through a special arrangement on **Genie** in 1991). Whether this would have prevented, slowed, or hastened **GDW**'s demise I leave as an exercise for the readers.

What I find most striking about the Internet these days is how easy it is to get sidetracked. I have never been able to make efficient use of a dictionary or encyclopedia—I dive in looking for something and am waylaid en route by entries totally unconnected to what I am after. Links and pop-up windows exacerbate this tendency in me, and I am evidently not alone. What I find most annoying about shopping the Web is the proliferation of suggestions about what I should buy. A large e-tailer is now running a commercial where a customer enters a doughnut shop and is faced with the real-word equivalent of all this: "People who bought glazed doughnuts also bought cake doughnuts, bear-claws, and eclairs." "Could I interest you in a book about doughnuts?" "Would you like to continue shopping or proceed to checkout?" "Will this be gift wrapped?" A subtitle then announces how the sponsor has changed the face of retailing—- and the assumption is that this is a good thing.

Other advertisers are taking a slightly different approach; one is now running an ad showing various people who have become derailed on the information railroad (one guy logs on looking for a pair of headphones and ends up four hours later in a chat room talking about hand lotion).

Technology often changes the world in unforeseen ways. In 1985, few people would have predicted that, in a few years, the most sought-after stocks would be in companies that have been in business less than 18 months, blown through millions in venture capital, and have never shown a profit. Last Christmas, many electronic retailers set up shop and prepared to take millions of orders—but evidently forgot to make arrangements to ship those orders. This season, however, things will be different—e-tailers have allied with major "brick and mortar" retailers, which will hopefully reassure consumers who got their Christmas gifts in February last year. It all makes me wonder how the current arrangement will look 10-15 years from now. (Not to mention eons in the future.)

> Loren Wiseman
> Editor, **JTAS**

* In the late 1980s, I was a member of an informal computer club in central Illinois—I and a friend were the only members who were not running a BBS (bulletin board system) out of our homes. A BBS was a place where you could call up a local number, get into an argument, and play games, —unlike today's more sophisticated system.

**He became angry when we refused him permission to violate our intellectual-property rights, and asked what we'd do if he did it anyway. He didn't like our answer to that question, either.

Dec 04, 2000, Aliens 1

This week, I thought I'd touch on a couple of things I've learned about creating non-human aliens. I have been in on the creation of more than a few over the years, and people might find some of my observations thought-provoking.

First is the question of how alien a given creation can be—after all, if the human mind can conceive of it, it can't be all that alien, can it? Going too far to the "understandable"

side of the graph creates a problem John Harshman used to refer to as the "rubber suit syndrome"—human behavior in a non-human body. The more understandable you make a given alien, the less alien it becomes. A lot of television and movie aliens are like this (take an actor, glue a horseshoe crab to his forehead and presto! Instant alien.*). They have the same motivations, the same flaws, the same virtues as people, they're just robin's egg blue and have pointy ears and white hair.**

Of the major races in **Traveller**, the Vargr are probably the most like humans, followed by the Aslan. The Droyne are more enigmatic, and the Hivers and K'kree are the farthest from human. People can (and have) used all of these races as characters, which indicates that we have managed to convey the underlying concepts of them to enough people to make them understandable. I have heard a few fans say that we didn't go far enough, and that all of the aliens in the game are too human-like.

Conversely, if a being is too far out, nobody can understand the being's motivation(s), and the critter will be almost useless in an RPG. John Campbell (the editor who started so many SF writers on their careers) used to encourage writers to create aliens that could think as well as a man, but not just like a man.

In some ways, the problem of "realistic aliens" is unsolvable. How can we realistically depict something about which we have only the vaguest notion? I can no more imagine the inhabitants of the rest of the universe (and I think it strains credulity to suppose humanity is alone in the universe) than I can predict what technology will actually be like in 100 years. But we weren't (and aren't) trying to create a perfect prediction of the future—we were trying to make a good game. Did we succeed? I think we did. **Traveller** is a very good game background, and I am pleased—overall—with the way the aliens have turned out. At least we don't have to tell the artists to put zippers in the front of our aliens.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There's a very good reason for this, of course. Until the advent of computer graphics, having an alien that couldn't be represented by an actor (with or without horseshoe crab) was almost prohibitively expensive. Special effects were costly—face paint and latex cheekbones were cheap. This is changing rapidly—as a survey of current TV commercials will show—but it is only just beginning to change the face (no pun intended) of the on-screen alien.

** Furry fandom should not take offense here—"furries" are a separate genre, and not what I'm talking about here.

Dec 11, 2000, The Lucky Winners

First, the lucky winners of the Name the **Cardboard Heroes** contest.

Number 1: Wolfgang Jacob MacKenzie, Captain of the Free Trader Shamrock, submitted by Andrew Boulton.

Number 2: Dr. Andrea Shin, submitted by Douglas E. Berry.

Number 3: Major Brick James, submitted by Todd Hill.

Number 4: Alice "Granny Hardcase" Hardcastle, submitted by John Schmidt.

I had some hard choices, but I finally managed to choose four from among the many entries. Thanks to everybody who participated. I've already e-mailed the winners, but given the way the mail is working these days (it being the Christmas mailing season and all), it may be a while before the prizes arrive.

Dec 11, 2000, Yin and Yang

There are two broad categories of **Traveller** fans—those who take the game dead serious, and those who do not.* Despite my title, these two types are not mutually exclusive—most fans are a mixture of both types and very few occupy extremes.** At one end are the fans to whom it is vitally important to preserve the notion that the game represents this universe 5,000-some-odd years from now. The discovery of a planet in orbit around a star other than our own causes these people to revise their game maps (even if their campaigns are set in the Spinward Marches).

At the other pole are the people who take a less critical view—**Traveller** is not a 99% accurate predictor of the way the future will be, and so what if there are fewer green giant stars (suppliers of frozen lima beans in butter sauce) or red dwarves (the universe's main source of guffaws) than current observations indicate.

Enthusiasts of the first type are not unique to **Traveller**, of course. About a week ago, I saw a note posted on a **2300 AD** mailing list. It seems that the main stellar catalog reference database upon which we based the game's star map (I want to say "Gliese" but don't quote me) was about to undergo (or had recently undergone) a major revision. The poster wondered what **GDW** would have done had they still been in business and were still producing the game. Would we have revised the map? Would we have changed the background universe to match the new discoveries?

Questions like this are sometimes hard to answer with anything more affirmative than "Maybe" (which is pretty much what I said—we would have made a decision based on our estimate of the market and consumer demand). In **2300 AD**,the scale of the game was such that slight changes in star positions, or new stars in certain spots, would have led to different patterns of settlement and might have called for radical changes in the game world and its history (which we developed in considerable detail). It is a great temptation to decline to revise the original map and keep the game background intact, but this risks losing a certain number of fans. On the other hand, the fan base reacts with hostility to any new edition, especially radical revisions of background ("They're making us buy all the books over again!" is the usual accusation). It's a tough decision to make.

One of the game universes I was heavily involved in at **GDW** was **Twilight: 2000,** which postulated a gradually escalating nuclear war starting in November of 1997 and accelerating to the near-complete destruction of civilization by July 2000. I'm overjoyed this particular game background proved to be inaccurate!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I was tempted to say "There are two types of **Traveller** fans—those who divide people into two groups, and those who do not." But I didn't (well, actually, I did, but not up there in the main body of the text where it counts). Go back to your reading now . . . Nothing to see here . . . Move along. Move along.

** OK, you've caught me—I have always wanted to use an opening like this and I finally gave in to temptation.

Dec 18, 2000, From the Publisher: This Is Too Much Fun

One thing that I probably don't express often enough is how purely neat it is to be the publisher of **JTAS** and **GURPS Traveller.** I have enjoyed the **Traveller** world for a long time. The whole alternate milieu of **GURPS Traveller** stems directly from my own dismay at the assassination of Strephon and the breakup of the Imperium. When I found out that

others felt the same way . . . well, I was in a position to ask Marc if he'd let me do something about it. And I did, and he did, and the rest is history.

I really enjoy being able to see the new books (and other things) develop. It's wonderful to sit around and argue about exactly how a Vargr's face should look, or what kind of long-term marketing plans the multistellars have. One reason this is fun is because I love the background, but it's also fun because the background is already well-enough developed that further interesting details can be extrapolated. For instance (just thinking back . . .)

Because Vargr are evolved from wolves, their body language is enough like that of dogs that Humans can read it. But Vargr have no racial experience of apes, so they can't read Humans nearly as well. I'd like to see a lot more done with the interactions between the different races.

The design of the original **Modular Cutter** amounted to an "open architecture," like IBM for computers. It was that thought that led to the **Modular Cutter** book.

The legal concept of "extrality" may seem simple, but there will be a lot of very complex consequences more subtle than "We're busted, run for the starport!". The interface between the Imperium and its worlds is really very interesting . . .

It's also been great to watch **JTAS** develop. I think that what Loren and Monica and Keith and Jackie and I have built here is close to the ideal game-specific webzine. Certainly this is the model we'll follow when another game needs its own specialist fan site. It's a great way to serve the player community and to get very valuable quick feedback from the people who are the "opinion leaders" among the game fans. So rest assured . . . you, yes, you reading this now, are a part of our planning process.

Ramping Up

And apparently the readers are having fun, too, because the **GURPS Traveller** products continue to be among our most popular. Therefore, we're ramping up our production. We're interviewing for another **Traveller** editor, and we're trying out different kinds of products for the line.

The Deck Plans were the first such experiment. Reaction to the **Beowulf** set has been very good so far, so we'll continue with a couple more. At that point, if you folks are still buying them and enjoying them, we'll see about making them a regular series!

At some point before long, we will collect the **Cardboard Heroes** miniatures from the various Deck Plan sets, add a few more, and publish a whole book of them.

And metal miniatures remain a possibility. Right now, we have neither the license to produce metal figures nor the means to do it—demand for the **Ogre** line is taking up all our sculpting and casting capacity. But don't give up. We're not.

The Planetary Survey Series

However, our very next experiment is going to be simple words on paper; only the format will be different. And here's the first announcement: **The Planetary Survey Series** will be 32-page books, each about one particular world that makes a good background for adventure or intrigue. We will launch **The Planetary Survey Series** in March, with **Kamsii/Core,** co-authored by Loren and me. We're going to try to do another **Survey** book every month!

This series will give us a way to take detailed looks at specific world settings, in a way that we could never do in a sector book. Each Survey book will include basic survey data, maps, trade information, and other campaign "groundwork." Building on that will be descriptive material focusing on the planet's unique features . . . enough background to let the GM take a party there for a brief stopover or a long stay . . . and, of course, campaign ideas and adventure seeds. Each book will be rounded off by appropriate details, which may

include NPC/patron/opponent descriptions, creature statistics, a new vehicle or starship, a new minor race, or something entirely different.

It's also likely that this series will be a way to help new writers break in . . . a stepping stone between **JTAS** articles and entire worldbooks. Which gets back to the "ramping up" idea. With any luck, in a few months, there'll always be at least one brand new **Traveller** and/or **GURPS Traveller** product in the store for you.

And I think that's neat.

Steve Jackson
Publisher

Dec 19, 2000, Winter

I'm writing this before I leave for my Christmas vacation, but it is appearing on the 26th of December, which is St. Stephen's Day, aka Boxing Day, and the first day of Kwanzaa (I think). Right now, if all goes well, I'm in central Illinois, still digesting Christmas dinner at my sister's house. If all doesn't go well, I'm stranded at an airport somewhere en route, and the less said about that possibility the better.

Boxing Day is celebrated in Canada, the UK, and a few other places. For those readers unfamiliar with the day, it is a day where management and labor, bosses and underlings, officers and ORs (other ranks—enlisted men to Americans), servants and masters switch jobs for a day, often accompanied by a party. This custom dates back a couple of thousand years, to the Roman Saturnalia, when masters and slaves used to swap jobs (and I really wonder how that worked in practice).

I have to take the time to make an observation that occurs to me around holiday time, when the stores are filled with Christmas songs on the Muzak/radio/PA system—at least some of them are Christmas songs. There are a few so- called "Christmas songs" that don't mention Christmas. They are songs celebrating winter, and what a glorious season it is—or at least, what a glorious season people used to think it was—that only get played during the Christmas season, and vanish from the airwaves during the rest of the year. Take the song **Jingle Bells**, for example. Not a single mention of Christmas. The song celebrates a ride in a horse-drawn sleigh—rosey cheeks, jingling bells on the bob- tailed nag, etc. Over the River talks about going to Grandmother's house (possibly for Christmas, and verses to this effect are sometimes added), which is evidently located so far into the boonies there is no all-weather road to it ("the horse knows the way, to carry the sleigh, o'er the white and drifted sno-ow"). **Let It Snow** and **Walking in a Winter Wonderland** celebrate being in love in the winter. **Frosty the Snowman** is another Christmas classic without much to connect it to Christmas. These songs reflect a period of American when the population had begun the shift from rural to urban society (approximately 1900-1920), but before the invention of air conditioners allowed the "Sun-Belt" to be inhabitable during the summer and the great migration from the industrial northeast/midwest began. Most people didn't have to work outside in all weathers, so winter came to be viewed with a kind of nostalgia—sleds, ice skates, snowmen, sleigh rides, and (later) skiing. America has changed in a few generations—winter has a bad reputation now. A few inches of snow is now primarily viewed as an impediment to transportation, a chance for people to get a "snow day" vacation from school or work, or the cause of flight delays and stranded travelers. Americans now do not so much celebrate winter as try to prove themselves immune to it.

Oddly enough, in some places, winter actually made some kinds of transportation easier. Before paved roads, winter was the time when it was easiest to move heavy loads. The ground was frozen, so heavily laden wagons wouldn't sink to their axles in the mud. Snow

and ice help a sled by reducing friction between vehicle and ground. Draft animals weren't needed to pull plows and such. In those days, road maintenance didn't consist of plowing the snow to the side, melting the ice with salt, and scattering sand or gravel to increase traction; road crews used giant rollers to compress the snow into a solid surface, and would sprinkle water to encourage formation of sheets of ice.

My point, which I have gotten to in a roundabout way, is that those of us in advanced, high-tech cultures sometimes forget there are low-tech means of accomplishing things. The pyramids, Stonehenge, the Coliseum (and every other building in the Roman empire), and Chartres cathedral were built with nothing much more than sledges, rope, the occasional block-and-tackle, and a lot of muscle (human and animal). I think the relevance of this notion to **Traveller** is self-evident.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Dec 31, 2000, Comes the Millennium

First of all, I hope everyone had a good holiday—whichever of the seasonal celebrations you follow. I spent Christmas at my sister's in Illinois, after a short visit-to a few friends in various spaces in the state (despite the 8-10 inches of snow up North, my travels were not delayed until I got to Houston on the return flight). I received several additions to my eclectic music collection courtesy of my younger brother (who has the closest notion to what I will enjoy*).

Despite the celebration last year, I hold that the 21st century starts 1 January 2001, and that last year was the last year of the old century, not the first of the new (I've laid in a bottle of Calvados to toast the new year). Steven Jay Gould considers the celebrations last year a triumph of popular over high culture, to which I say "Harumph!"** In any case, the argument will be moot in a few days and the new century and the new millennium will be under way. I'm not going to get into the question of whether technological advances will continue at their present rate. (If they do, the universe will be totally unrecognizable to me before I'm 100. Please treat me with some consideration, assuming you're not in the same boat—perhaps you will all join me in the Home for the Terminally Confused?)

On the other hand, I really wonder if that will be the problem that everyone seems to think it will. After the Second World War, many isolated cultures (some of them still in the Neolithic for practical purposes) were pulled into the 20th Century within a generation. Aside from a few minor blips (like the cargo cults of the South Pacific), these groups seem to have made the adjustment to modern civilization fairly well. My father's generation saw radio and television become widespread, and my grandfather's witnessed the changes that came with widespread electricity (check back in your family tree—this may have happened to your ancestors sooner than you might think). I think that in 50 years, most people won't understand the underlying concepts of the technology in their everyday lives, but I submit that most people don't really understand how technology works today. How many people know how a computer works? An automobile? A magnet? A microwave oven was magic to my father (who used to build radios from scratch when he was in school), but that didn't prevent him from using one every morning to make breakfast. I suspect that most of us will make the transition to the future (whatever that turns out to be) just fine—but I probably won't have a cell phone tattooed on the inside of my eyelid. The very notion gives me the willies . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My tastes run primarily classical, although as I write this, I'm listening to Harry Belafonte's rendition of **Jump in the Line**, which was preceded by a medley of Tom Lehrer tunes, and before that a collection by the **Canadian Brass**—I think I'll follow Harry with some Vivaldi and that should carry me through the end of the editorial.

** You may substitute " *Humbug*!" at your option.

2001

2001

Jan 08, 2001, Agony and Ecstasy

For the past couple of weeks, I have set my work on **Nobles** aside temporarily and worked on the first of the **Planetary Survey** books. This is my first major collaboration with Steve Jackson, and the first time I've ever had to create a world from the ground up in such detail. I've chosen a title reflective of my feelings at this point, and I'll deal with them in order.

First, the agony part: All these numbers make my brain hurt. "Dammit, Jim, I'm a historian, not an abacus!" Even figuring out a few simple things about the binary system overloaded my mathematical talents, which were meager to start with.* I managed to stumble through the system presented in **First In** (which I, as a non-astronomer, found easy to use once I got the hang of it), and came up with a system that met my basic requirements.

In addition to the problems caused by my near-total innumeracy (the mathematical equivalent to illiteracy), I fought one of my old demons—writer's block. As I mentioned in a previous editorial, writing for me is glacially slow (more on this below).

The good stuff: It has been years since I got to come up with fun stuff like this. When we were in the planning meeting, laying out a list of possible subjects for the **Planetary Survey Series**, the words "*Pleasure Planet*" jumped out at me, and I volunteered to take that. Later, it was decided that Steve and I should co-author the first book, and we met to bounce ideas off each other. It has been a while since I worked on a project that was as much pure, simple fun as this one. The whole approach was from a unique angle (I won't tell you more for fear of spoiling the surprise), but Steve and I both had a great deal of fun working this one out. One of the things I have discovered about most collaborations is that when you get two people bouncing ideas off each other, you get more than twice the good ideas either person could have come up with alone.

All through the project, Steve has been writing rings around me, and I am insanely jealous of his ability to get the words to come in a torrent rather than a trickle.

The final results of our labors will appear as **Planetary Survey 1: Kamsii/Core—the Pleasure World**. I hope you have half as much fun reading it as I have writing it . . . and I hope you have none of the pain.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Several people urged me to download a program that would perform the mechanics of system creation automatically. I spent six hours in three separate attempts to pull down the program on my antiquated machine, and each attempt except the last two ended in a crash after a considerable amount of downloading. My second to last attempt managed to successfully download a compressed program which refused to unzip. The last attempt got a program which unzipped, but refused to install. I don't know what the problem was, and I'm not in the mood to try to find out—my machine is one of the older, slower Pentiums, and those whose advice is "Buy a better computer" are cordially invited to give me the money to do so or persuade my landlord to shelter me *gratis* for six weeks.

Jan 15, 2001, One Man's Oppression

While we were working on the text for the first **Planetary Survey** book, Steve and I had some discussions of what a really oppressive, minimal-personal-liberties government might be like.* We concluded that we had no real concept of a truly oppressive society, and

could only depend on our reading and the (relayed) experiences of others.

I have some experience with a slightly oppressive society, at least one that denied me considerable personal privacy and a few other rights—I grew up in a small town in rural Illinois, in a household with eight people and one bathroom with no lock on the door. I grew up with very little personal privacy, and considerable experience with what I felt at the time was unrelenting oppression from older siblings (I had four brothers and one sister, all but one of them older than me—it was like growing up in a men's dormitory). I emerged from this ordeal essentially undamaged (it did instill one trait in me I cannot, to this day, get rid of—I always lock the bathroom door, sometimes even when I am alone in my apartment, because I can).

During the time I was working on my sections of the **Kamsii** manuscript, I saw a news item on a local TV station and a conversation on the **TML** took place that both struck me as vaguely relevant.

The news item concerned a growing aspect of some jobs: monitoring. Most employers monitor their employee's e-mail, the story said, but some employers are starting to monitor their employee's movements. According to the reporter, an increasing number of employers (mostly hospitals) are requiring their employees to wear tracking devices (something we describe in **Kamsii**). These show where a given employee is at every second during the workday. These devices show whether an employee is where he is supposed to be (in the case of a hospital, it tracks how much time each nurse spends with each patient, how long they spend in supply rooms, the lounge, etc.). Many interstate trucking companies monitor the location of each of the trucks in their fleet, their speed, and so on. Workers at computer terminals doing data input or secretarial work are monitored by the computer itself—the machine tracks typing speed and the like.

All societies except pure anarchy place some restrictions on their citizens, and attempt to discourage certain behaviors while encouraging others. Discouraging crime is something that governments try to do, and a few communities have begun installing video cameras in certain areas to make monitoring easier. Computer facial recognition is in its infancy, but several communities around the globe are starting to use this technology to track known criminals.

When I was growing up in that small town, one of the key facets of life there was that everybody knew who you were. You were, effectively, under constant observation, and if (for example) you regularly snuck a few peeks at certain men's magazines from the upper levels of the rack at the corner grocery, your parents would almost certainly find out. There are few secrets in a small town—and technology is bringing the benefits of the small town to the largest cities. Every transaction I make at the ATM, at the 7-11, at the bank, at the grocery store, is monitored by security cameras. Every purchase I make goes into someone's customer database. "Traffic-cams" watch drivers at strategic places and record the license numbers of any who run a stoplight or breeze by without paying a toll. Libraries are under increasing pressure to reveal the reading interests of their patrons to law enforcement.

Torquemada, Hitler, and **Stalin** must be weeping in jealousy—universal surveillance of all citizens, at least in public, seems to be approaching with great speed. I'm not too sure what I think of that. I trusted my mother to be even-handed and fair about my youthful choice of reading matter. But the government is not my mother, and I view the future with a certain amount of ambivalence. TV shows of assorted incidents culled from security-camera footage are increasingly popular (mostly with producers, who find things like **World's Clumsiest Criminals** very cheap to produce). An increasing number of people put cameras in their homes (or other people's), as a short Web search under "web-cam" or "spy-cam" will reveal. I think this last is what bothers me the most—I am disturbed by the government watching my every move. I am even more disturbed by the notion that my neighbors

(the **Kallikaks**—look it up) are collecting video for **World's Clumsiest Game Designers.** The concept of life in a goldfish bowl bothers me a little—that's why I still lock the door sometimes.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* During the conversations, Steve asked if I had read David Brin's **The Transparent Society**, and I had to admit I had not. The book sounds interesting and I intend to read it soon.

Jan 22, 2001, Ya Dunno What Ya Got 'til It's Gone

I am reminded, once again, how fragile modern society is—how interlinked we have become. As I walked in to work this morning, I noticed two things about the **SJ Games** lot:

First, there was a fair-sized flow of water running halfway down the block to the storm drain—not a torrent, by any means, but enough to have sluiced some dirt and sand from the driveway a few feet down the road. At first I thought nothing of this, as it has been raining lately, and there are puddles and such everywhere. As I got closer to the office, however, I noticed the flow was pretty steady, more so than could be accounted for by the rain.

Second, as I arrived at the office drive and began walking up it, I noticed a couple of large tire tracks through the grass, very close to the retired railroad ties **SJ Games** uses as a driveway marker (at least, that's all I thought they were used for—see below).

It seems that the railroad ties not only mark the driveway, however, they also shelter the company water meter. Closer investigation by others has led to the theory that our water meter was damaged by a car that missed the turn and jumped the curb. **SJ Games** is located on the outside bend of a turn in the street—it is not uncommon for drivers to overdo their speed going into the turn and scrape their tires on the curb (the black marks of scraped rubber are a constant feature). This driver, however, not only bumped the curb but jumped it by a considerable margin and banged into our water meter. This means, of course, that to repair it, water must be cut off. We must get by without plumbing for a few hours.

I am not alone in taking many things for granted. I sleep warm in the winter and cool in the summer. I can work as late into the night as I care to, illuminated by electric lights. I turn a nozzle and a flood of reasonably clean* water pours out, seemingly limitless in quantity—I can drink it, wash in it, and soak in a huge hot tub of it for hours, refreshing the temperature until my toes shrivel up into prunes if I've a mind to do so and I need not worry that I'll get dysentery or cholera or any one of a dozen other things. My paternal grandparents lived in a small hamlet in southern Illinois that had no municipal water supply or sewer system. Their water came from a tank on the roof, filled by a pump (electric, by the time I got there, but in my father's day it was hand-operated). Hot water came from a smaller tank, heated by an oil-burning furnace, and was strictly rationed. Other services were provided by a small, two-seater outhouse about 50 feet from the back door (or a chamber pot under the bed, if it was too cold). I have, therefore, a small inkling of what it is like to be deprived of the copious supply modern society provides.

An item on the **ABC Evening News** from last week, however, informs me that nearly half of the world's population does not have regular access to a clean water supply. Many Californians are discovering what it's like to be forced do without electricity for a few hours.

How fragile is civilization on the frontier worlds of the Third Imperium? Are they a few days away from starvation, a few weeks away from drought? Do they ever turn their faucets and get a skinny, rust-colored trickle, and count themselves lucky it's working at all?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I say "reasonably clean" because I dislike the smell and taste of the chlorine in the city water in Austin. I grew up in a small town, and am used to water that tastes slightly metallic from the iron and limestone it contains, coming straight from the Mahomet Aquifer with little or no treatment needed. Austin gets its water from a lake created by damming a river, and requires somewhat more treatment than I am used to. A small investment in a filter pitcher solved that problem.

Jan 29, 2001, Nothing New

The old saying goes: "*There's nothing new under the sun.*" Perhaps this is not strictly true—but it pretty much holds for writing. I ran across a Web site called **Wordplay** a couple of years ago, and it is full of useful things, but one of them is something called **The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations**, by George Polti. The site has reproduced only a summary of this 19th-century opus, but basically it is (or says it is) the proof that there are only a limited number of "dramatic situations" . . . plots, in other words. Go and check it out, it is thought-provoking. And the site as a whole is well worth surfing, even if you have no thoughts of trying your hand at screenwriting.*

Anybody who writes has seen this principle in action: you write something (a short story, a screenplay, an RPG adventure) and eventually, someone else makes a movie, best-selling novel, or TV series out of something so eerily similar that you think (if only for a second) that your idea was stolen. This has happened to me several times. When I was in high school, I wrote a novel about a teenager and a mermaid. I was inspired by a couple of "mysteries of the sea" books that I had read, and proceeded to crank out 30,000 words or so. It was the first large piece of writing I ever managed to complete, but I never worked up the courage to submit it for publication (I was too shy to show it to anyone, but my little brother later verified he had surreptitiously read it). I put it away until I went to college, and looked at it a couple of years later. I was so horrified at how bad it was, I destroyed it.

Segue ahead a few years. I see a movie called **Splash**—Ron Howard directed, starring the (then unknown) Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah—a romantic comedy about a guy and a mermaid. I was stunned—the plot was identical (see below). I wondered how Ronnie Howard had laid hands on my novel—I only made one copy and never discussed it with anyone.

Eventually, the cold light of reality dawned. The plot had little in the way of actual similarities. "Romance—mermaid—comedic results" was pretty much all they shared. Splash and my story both grew out of a similar speculation: "What would happen if mermaids were real and a guy fell in love with one?" I later discovered that the subject was not a stranger to the movie medium (I leave the proof of this as an exercise for the reader).

The point is, story ideas come from inspiration. Inspiration comes from reading, watching movies, living, looking, listening—and thinking. There are only 36 (or 99, or 13, or whatever number the particular authority you consult comes up with) basic plots because people tend to think along the same lines, and the same things inspire them. You read something, you think "What would happen if . . . " and if you like the answer, you have an idea. Isaac Asimov once remarked that he was inspired to write the **Foundation Series** partly by Gibbon's **Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**, which got him thinking about large institutions in general and their deterioration in particular.

The odds are, however, that you are not the only person to be inspired by a given set of facts. I'm not claiming that plagiarism never occurs; what I am saying is that people tend to think along the same lines and come to similar conclusions. How many movies are based

on **Situation 11-B-1: "THE ENIGMA** (*Elements: Interrogator, Seeker, and Problem*)—**A Riddle To Be Solved on Pain of Death**"?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I have almost never met anyone with a three-digit IQ that had not, at some point in his or her life, thought about writing a screenplay or a novel. Few people can watch a movie and not think of how it could have been done better.

Feb 05, 2001, Has it Been a Year Already?

I had originally planned for the subject of this week's **From the Editor** to be about the upcoming anniversary of the first issue of **JTAS**. I missed it, however, and that date has already passed—funny how time creeps up on you. If I had the time, we could insert a cute little MPEG of me slapping my forehead and making a "doh!" sound. I had the date of the 15th fixed in my mind, and I think that was because that is when the initial subscriptions begin expiring—but I neglected to take into account the fact that we offered **JTAS** free for a while, and that meant the first birthday was a couple of weeks earlier.

Anyway, **JTAS** is now a year old, and those of you who subscribed last year about this time will soon be getting an e- mail reminder to re-subscribe. I hope all of you will choose to do so. We've got some interesting and exciting things in store for you. Stick around!

There has been a huge discussion generated by last week's poll, sparked in particular by the fact that **Core** seems to be the leading contender for the area that people would like to see developed in a sector book. It all started when one reader asked what was so exciting about **Core,** and soon developed into a lively comparison of individual campaigns and GMing styles. Many people prefer frontier adventures, and it is easy to see their attraction: There's always a convenient border to cross when things get too hot in one place. Opportunities for smuggling and other less than strictly legal activities are everywhere. Frontiers are exciting, there's no doubt. But settled, civilized areas have their attractions as well, as has been pointed out by several people on the discussion boards. **Core** has vast adventuring potential, but a campaign set there would have a different feel than one in the **Spinward Marches.**

All of this reminds me of a similar discussion, held using snail mail/phone calls/personal contact (this was before the Internet and bulletin boards were available). Shortly after **GDW** published the **Solomani Rim,** we asked for fan input about what sectors to do next. Fans were about equally divided between "Let's see a more settled, civilized area" and "Stick with the wild and woolly frontiers." Discussion in those days followed pretty much the same vein as the one recently—two camps divided over what made a good **Traveller** campaign and what didn't. It is interesting to see that the fan base has remained pretty much the same, even though most of the members have changed.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 12, 2001, Hot-Buttons

OK, this week's title is a bit of a misnomer, but I couldn't come up with something more suitable. I picked it because the first item on the discussion always seems to spark a heated

discussion. Basically, I'm going to discuss a few things that are highly unlikely to make it into the official **Traveller** universe. I'm going to leave out a few things I've already discussed in **GURPS Traveller** itself (like nanotech), because I've previously dealt with them. Those of you who want to speculate on what I've left out of this column are welcome to do so. Also, if you want my personal opinions on any of these "hot-button" issues, e-mail me.

Religion: Religion is a highly charged issue (indeed, the **TML** has just had its semi-annual science-vs.-religion flamewar*) that always seems to metastasize into a dozen smaller (but equally virulent) discussions. We've specified a few religions in various publications over the years, but we have never specified any "official" religion of the Imperium—and we never will. I leave such questions to the individual GMs to deal with or ignore as they see fit.

Time Travel: Time travel is a tempting feature of RPGs (indeed, I've designed a couple of TT games that never saw print), but in **Traveller**, I think it would be a fast track to insanity for the GM. There is enough to keep up with as it is, and a single time-traveling game session could render untold gigabytes of background obsolete.

Other "Ancients": We already have one incredibly-advanced-but-long-vanished society, and I'm strongly inclined not to have any more. (GMs who wish to make the "official Ancients" the fable and establish their own "real ancients" are free to do so.)The main reason I am opposed to this is that it is a never-ending cycle—there is no reason to stop creating an even older and even more advanced group than the one you currently have. I prefer not to open the floodgates.

But as they say on the **TML**, "YMMV" (*Your Mileage May Vary*), meaning that, as always, GMs are free to introduce any or all of these things into their personal campaigns.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I wish we could get a restraining order—"Religion must stay at least 1,000 yards away from science at all times." It would save a lot of wasted electrons, and let the **TML** get back to important discussions, like the infamous near-C rock-dropping argument.

Feb 19, 2001, Art and Artists

There are several reasons to have artwork in a game book. A vitally important one is that consumers who casually flip through a book at a store will be repelled by too much text, whereas artwork will attract their eye and make them look at the product more closely. Games need illustrations for another reason, however, and it is one that is not mentioned too often: illustrations tell people what the world looks like. The illustrations show them what their characters look like, they show them the buildings, animals, vehicles, and equipment of a world. A player need not be shown everything, but he does need to get a good outline of a place if his mind's eye is to "fill in" the details.*

I often think that one of my most valuable contributions to the **Traveller** universe was to use William H. Keith as primary illustrator for the old print **JTAS** articles. Bill's illustrations defined the look of the Traveller universe and set the style for all subsequent artists.

A good working relationship with an artist is a very valuable thing. Every person sees things slightly differently, and part of establishing a rapport with an artist is determining how to describe what you want in such a way that they will illustrate something close to it. This was where Bill Keith really stood out: What he put on paper was almost always exactly what I had in mind. Marc or Frank or I could describe something to Bill, and in a few minutes, he was sketching it out—exactly as described.

I've dealt with a number of great artists over the years, and I have always envied them.

They can take what's in their mind's eye—their inner vision of something—and put it on paper (or the screen, these days) almost directly. All I can do is describe it, and the limitations of language (and my skill with language) keep me from achieving a perfect match. To be sure, art has its limits, too, but I think artists come closer to their inner vision than I do, and I envy them that ability.

Notice that I am now using the words "illustrate" and "illustrations"—this is because there is a major difference between artwork and illustration, between the fine arts and the graphic arts. Fine art inspires, it conveys emotion, it says something the artist wants to say. Graphic art also says something, but the voice is the person paying the money, not the artist. Art is what the artist does for himself—illustration is what the artist does to pay the rent. And if you are really lucky, you get both at the same time.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Most people have some imagination, but the vast majority are not up to the task of creating a complete world in their mind's eye without some help. Art shows them the details of the world, and what their characters are interacting with. This is especially true of historical and SF/fantasy worlds, where the clothing, physical appearance, and overall look of the people and places of a game world may not be common knowledge. Players find it easier to get into a game when they know what their characters look like and what the surroundings look like. I think this is one of the reasons goth- type LARPS are popular: people have no trouble imagining the world because it is (pretty much) this one.

Feb 26, 2001, Assorted What-Have-You

There is no single topic this week, just some assorted thoughts:

The first year's subscriptions are expiring as we speak, and I will be very interested to see how many of the initial subscribers decide to stay with us. So far, people seem to be re-subscribing in large numbers (a few even extended their subscriptions before they expired). A few subscribers have had some minor problems, mostly because they've forgotten their password, but all in all, things are going well.

I was reading an e-mail recently in which my correspondent mentioned the fact that he did not have his GT books at work. The thought occurred to me that I am one of a very few people who can have GT books at work without the boss complaining—indeed, I am required to have them at work. Marc once said he was probably the only person on Earth who made his living designing interstellar starships. After some thought, he amended the statement, saying he was the only person outside of NASA.

I don't think my parents ever completely understood what I do for a living. Both understood the concept of games well enough, and my mother could grasp the basics of RPGs, but roleplaying was totally out of my father's frame of reference. Let's pretend* was a children's game to him, and he could not grasp the need for written rules, let alone why anyone would buy such a thing. I think he thought I was doing something like writing novels, something which was in his frame of reference (he devoured western novels, especially those of Zane Grey).

Oddly enough for one in my position, I am one of the least technogeek people I know. I own numerous computers collected over the years, but few of them were cutting edge when I got them. I do not own a fax machine (although my computer says it can be configured to act as such). I have an answering machine for my telephone, but I do not subscribe to call waiting or any of the other "enhanced features" BellSouth wants me to shell out for. I

do own a stereo CD player, but my sizable collection of cassette tapes means that I bought a combination CD/cassette machine. I own a VCR (VHS, not Beta) and I'll probably get a DVD machine eventually. I don't have a cellular phone (and my regular phone is a corded type, not portable).

The biggest thing that separates me from most of the rest of the America is that I do not drive. I am severely nearsighted in one eye and farsighted in the other, which means that I have no depth perception (I have to concentrate, willing the two images to merge—it lasts only a few seconds and is painful)—hundreds of puzzles and 3D effects are lost on me, I cannot deal with fast-moving objects like the balls involved in most sports, and driving is a nerve-wracking experience that leaves me quivering and sweating. If I lived in Los Angeles, I'd have been placed in a mental institution long ago; if I lived in New York City, no one would think me in the least unusual.

I hope one or more of these have proven thought-provoking.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* RPGs are, in one sense, just the childhood game of let's pretend codified and dressed up with (more or less) sophisticated rules. In some ways, they also resemble a form of improvisational theater (my youngest brother says RPGs played with miniatures are improvisational puppet theater).

Mar 05, 2001, Technology 1

A few weeks ago, I received my monthly statement from the large bank that administers one of my credit cards.* It credited my account with a payment of over $200, which is in error (I don't owe them that much). I called the bank's customer service line (an adventure in itself), and finally got through to report the problem. Once I managed to reach a living human being, I explained the problem, and was told it would be handled and was thanked profusely for reporting the problem.

The bank's response was quick—within two days, I received a letter. Here's a quotation of the relevant portion: We would like to take this opportunity to apologize for an error concerning your MasterCard account.

On a payment, 0.00 in the amount of $to your account in e was applied or debited. In order to correct this, we have 0.00 your account $.

I made a copy of this letter, blanked out my personal data, and posted it to the **SJ Games** employee bulletin board, highlighting the sentence "If you have any questions, please contact our office," and adding the notation "Where do I begin?" This was clearly a letter generated by some kind of automatic letter-writing process that had become scrambled during the printout . . . but it was not intercepted by the bank's quality-control procedures (assuming they have any). I eventually got things straightened out, the $200+ (presumably) went to its rightful recipient, and my account is back to normal (for now, at least).

After **GDW** closed, I worked part-time as a clerk for the IRS, answering their forms-request 800 number. One of the things I was told was that the IRS prefers to hire operators rather than make use of automated menus, unlike most of American business. The thinking seems to be that people hate automated menus, and since people are already angry and frustrated when they call the IRS, talking to a person will placate them slightly (and this worked most of the time). The people I dealt with were relieved to be dealing with a human instead of a recording, and I think it was mainly because the machine is not yet sophisticated enough to properly translate "I . . . uh . . . need that big book with the . . . uh . . . blue

writing on the cover . . ." to "I need **Publication1**."

People are still needed in the loop. A person would have looked at the letter I received and thought "This is gibberish—- sent it back."** The bank and I would have been saved a lot of trouble and expense, and I would feel more confidence in the people in charge of my finances than I do now. Machines are cheaper then people (they don't need dental plans and pregnancy leave, for example), but they are also much more limited and less flexible. I don't think this is likely to change any time soon.

Unfortunately, the people (and machines) on the business side of the exchange have the added burden of having to deal with people on the consumer side of things. Consumers can be just as petty, overworked, and uncooperative as the worst customer-service operators. When working for the IRS, I was amazed at the inability of people to follow even the simplest of instructions. So we can hope that artificial intelligence in the future will be more sophisticated, and the consumer of the future will be greeted with "What's wrong?" rather can "Please choose from among the following choices: To access your account for balance information, press 1 . . ."

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I don't have very many credit cards—a lesson learned when I was forced into personal bankruptcy as a result of **GDW** closing up. Once the rubble settled, the upshot was that I cannot file for it again for 7 years. This means that, even though I have a poor credit rating, I am swamped by people who want to extend me credit (presumably because I [a] have a job and [b] cannot duck out from under it), mostly by offering to sell me a car (which they could repossess). I have acquired a couple of cards which I am attempting to use with some caution (first rule is no cash advances, second rule is no cash advances—there are other rules, but I've forgotten them).

**Well, he would have if he was at all interested in doing his job properly. This is a problem with motivation and training—how to get people to take some pride in their work is a constant problem in the American service industry and has been for years. But that's a different problem.

Mar 12, 2001, A Traveller Reading List, Part II

In a previous editorial, I commented on the SF authors who I thought had inspired **Traveller.** This time around, I propose to discuss works from other genres of fiction (and some non-fiction) that have (or may have) influenced my **Traveller** writing over the years. I read a lot of history, and a lot of historical novels, and much of what I have taken from them is unconscious, I suppose. First, a couple of specific authors:

C. S. Forester: Forester's **Hornblower** novels are some of the finest adventure fiction around. I discovered the series while in elementary school, when I stumbled upon what I like to call the "**Hornblower Trilogy**" (**Beat to Quarters, Ship of the Line, and Flying Colours**) tucked away in the "Young Adult" section. I call this a trilogy because it is a more-or-less self-contained story in three books, and was a wonderful introduction to the characters (I rapidly located and devoured all the rest). Within the internal chronology, the first book is **Mr Midshipman Hornblower.**

Forester was prolific, writing many excellent books, most of them concerning ships and the sea. Alexander Kent wrote a similar series (which I find not quite up to Forester's standards, but that's just me) on a British Naval officer called Richard Bolitho. I would be lynched by Patrick O'Brien's fans if I didn't mention the **Aubrey-Maturin Series,** which (to

my regret) I have only recently begun reading—also a cracking good read, but I cannot say they've influenced **Traveller.**

Bernard Cornwell: If you are a history buff, Cornwell's **Sharpe Novels** are as great to read as the **Hornblower Books**. Sharpe is a British soldier in the early 19th Century, and the books chronicle his career. Sharpe is also the subject of a great series of videos on **PBS.** Cornwell has also written several books on the American Civil War and the **Arthurian Legends** (I haven't seen any of the latter two, however).

History: I won't get specific here, except to say that I concentrate on ancient history—Imperial Rome especially, but not limited to that subject by any means.

Historical Novels: I devoured historical novels from an early age, and still do. My home-town library was well-equipped with the novels of Rosemary Sutcliff and Thomas Costain, and others. In college, I discovered George M. Fraser's **Flashman Series** (which had little influence on **Traveller** but a major one on *En Garde*.) In recent years, I have read the historical mysteries of Ellis Peters and Lindsay Davis, which leads me to the next group:

Mysteries: I am especially fond of police procedurals, of which the **87th Precinct Novels** of Evan Hunter (writing as Ed McBain) are a representative sample. Peter Lovesey's **Sgt. Cribb Series** seems to be presently out of print, but I'm sure they can be found in any library (these last combine historical with procedural, set as they are in London of the 19th Century.)

This is not a complete listing, but I'm recovering from a rather nasty virus, so I'll have to save the rest (like fantasy) for part III.*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There is no footnote this week, except, of course, for this one.

Mar 19, 2001, Ideas

Plague Update: For those of you who haven't heard, **SJ Games** has been hit by a particularly virulent strain of the flu virus—I am just now beginning to recover, but others of our staff are still under the weather, and those who are not home sick in bed are trying to work in spite of the disease, and are not operating at full capacity (I have rarely been so drained of energy—both mental and physical—by a disease).

Isaac Asimov used to say that the one question he could always count on from fans or interviewers was "Where do you get your ideas?" Over the years, people have asked me the same thing (usually they add the word "crazy" in front of "ideas"), as if the questioners think that ideas are a scarce commodity. This is partly true—good ideas are rare—but also partly false.

Ideas are easy, at least for me (and my communication with other writers tells me that it is much the same with them). Ideas constantly pop into my head, from all sorts of sources. I get ideas from reading newspapers, magazines, books, even advertisements (a single issue of **Newsweek** is good for at least one idea, and sometimes more). Real life encounters can spark ideas for characterization or minor situations. Or I'll hear a joke or a story, and it will spark an idea. Ideas come to me in dreams (the **GDW** double adventure **Marooned/Marooned Alone** was inspired by a dream I had). Sometimes I'll have a dozen or more ideas pop into my head each day, and it is rare for none to occur to me.

So what's the downside? Why haven't I become rich with the myriad of ideas that I've had over the years? There are several reasons:

First, and most important, I have to remember the idea. I've learned that I need to jot

it down as quickly as possible after it occurs to me, or I'm likely to forget it. I used to carry a small notebook, but I kept losing it or leaving it somewhere, so now I just try to jot quick notes on a piece of paper—I've usually got a scrap of paper in one of my pockets or in my billfold. In the past I dropped the scraps into a box, but now I transfer them to a computer file called "Ideas" (duh!).

Second, not all ideas are good ones. Less than one in a hundred are worth keeping, but sometimes it takes me a while to be able to see that. I like to let things sit around for a few weeks and then look them over (usually as I'm adding more ideas to the file). I'll edit bad ones out, and consolidate similar thoughts together.

Third, not all good ideas are complete. Most are simply fragments or bits of business that need to be combined with several others to make a complete adventure, book, novel, or whatever. I have a slip of paper from almost 5 years ago with the words "Nero's amber" written on it. I know what that means, but I can't figure out how to fit it with anything else—so far.

Fourth, not all the good ideas are relevant to **Traveller.** Sometimes I have a good idea for a screenplay* or a novel (or a bit that could go into one), but it is not something that would fit into the **Traveller** universe very well . . . or at all.

Finally, and most important: ideas are only part of a manuscript. Having an idea is only the first step—you then need more ideas, and you need to link them together so they make sense, and are entertaining, thought-provoking, and interesting to read. Getting ideas is the easy part—using them properly is the struggle.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I think I have remarked before that everybody I know with a three-digit IQ is either working on a screenplay/novel or has in the past. We all chase the same dream, it seems . . .

Mar 26, 2001, Real Life Gaming

I've been in numerous RPG campaigns over the years. Some were of a quasi-military nature; some were not. But most involved adventurers engaging in acts that would be considered criminally anti-social in most real-life locales. In the **D&D** games I played in, it was commonplace for a single fighter to wade into a horde of lesser beings at tremendous risk of life and limb, and usually emerging triumphant. In later games, such as **Traveller** or **Twilight: 2000,** behaviors started to resemble war movies, where one character held off hundreds of attackers while his comrades carried out the rest of the mission.

One of the more amusing games* I played in lasted for three or four sessions, and was GMed by a former GDW employee. The premise was interesting: We were ourselves.** The GM had created characters duplicating the real-life skills of the people playing in the game; I was Loren Wiseman (talk about type-casting). We were all traveling cross- country to a convention in California when we took a wrong turn and ended up in a small town in rural New Mexico. We were pulled over by the state police and told that we had been exposed to an accidental release of a dangerous biological agent, which we soon began to suspect was a cover story for some kind of wheels-within-wheels government plot involving UFOs and "things man was not meant to know."

During the game, it struck me as interesting that all of us, myself included, were engaging in vicarious activities that none of us would have dreamed of trying in real life. We broke out of the school gym the detainees were being held in, stole a couple of shotgun sand some other equipment from the trunk of a police car, and generally behaved like characters

in a game. We had to end the sessions before reaching a climax, but I believe we would have ended up destroying a huge underground complex inhabited by hideous beings from another dimension, then continued on to the convention.

I've always held that gaming is escapism and that it is largely therapeutic. I've never hit anyone in anger, but my character got to cold-cock a couple of bad guys. I had a great deal of fun playing a version of myself, and if I am ever pulled over in rural New Mexico by state police telling me I've been exposed to anthrax, I will probably go along peaceably like the rest of the populace and end up in a large vat of space slime on my way to another dimension.

Or perhaps not . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I think the rules used were **Cthulhu Now**, but don't quote me on that.
** Well, kind of idealized Hollywood versions of ourselves . . . my character was a lot more athletic than I am in real life, for example.

Apr 02, 2001, Discoveries

In a recent copy of **Newsweek**, I saw a headline announcing that a new discovery had upset all existing theories of human ancestry, accompanied by a cool illustration that seemed to contain a lot more information than it really did. A closer reading of the article indicated that, yes, one of the Leakey family* had uncovered yet another significant set of remains, but that it had not really overturned anything, merely posed another couple of dozen questions that we can't really answer until we uncover a lot more remains. It seems that the human lineage is more complex than was thought 20 years ago—there are a lot more precursors to Homo sapiens known now than there were, but how they relate to each other is still a matter for considerable debate. The headline promised more excitement than the discovery indicated (which is a problem with a lot of headlines, but that's a separate discussion).

It strikes me that this is typical of the way the sciences work (and pretty much always has). The average discovery doesn't suddenly shine a light on a totally new vista of human knowledge—what normally happens is a question or two will be answered and about a dozen more will be posed. The problem is, of course, that this isn't very exciting, and makes for really lousy adventures: "OK, you've discovered a previously unknown Ancient artifact, but all it does is expand the level of our ignorance about the Ancients." End a couple of scenarios like that, and you'll soon be chased down the street by a mob of torch-bearing players.

Reality is (with some exceptions) much too dull to make a good game—that's why we have games, after all.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Louis B., Richard, Mary, *et alia*. This family continues to make revolutionary (or at least important) anthropological discoveries like clockwork, and I think is currently working on its third (or fourth) generation . . . where do I go to buy a piece of that franchise?

Apr 09, 2001, *Quoz?*

I believe it was Robert Heinlein who said (words to the effect), "*Truth is stranger than fiction because fiction has to make sense.*" Consider the following (heavily edited) quote from Charles Mackay's **Extraordinary Popular Delusions and The Madness of Crowds** (p. 620):

"(W)e cannot help hearing from every side a phrase repeated with delight and received with laughter . . . (no) one utters this phrase without producing a laugh from all within hearing. It seems applicable to every circumstance, and is the universal answer to every question . . .

"Many years ago the favourite phrase (for, though but a monosyllable, it was a phrase in itself) was *Quoz*. This odd word took the fancy of the multitude in an extraordinary degree, and very soon acquired an almost boundless meaning . . . Every alehouse resounded with *Quoz*; every street-corner was noisy with it, and every wall for miles around was chalked with it."

If I wrote an article on the customs of the Imperium, and said that the latest fad of the citizenry of Capital was to spout "*Quoz*" at each other, the reaction of the readers would be "what a dumb, unrealistic thing to make up!". If **The West Wing** (or any other TV show) had a plotline even vaguely similar to the most recent U.S. presidential election, they'd have been run out of town on a rail. If any SF author had written that America would send 12 men to the moon and then never go back . . .

There are some things that just don't make it past most people's "suspension of disbelief" filter (I find it hard to believe some people think "*Whaazuuuup!*" was ever funny). Authors often take inspiration from real life (hence the use of phrases like "Plucked from the headlines!" in relation to some television shows). "Write what you know" is one of the most common pieces of advice given to prospective writers, which I always interpreted to mean "take characters and situations from real life whenever possible," rather than "write only about things you have personally experienced." I don't know many space travelers or interstellar merchants, so if I applied the latter interpretation, I wouldn't have much to contribute to **Traveller.**

What's important is what I like to call "*perceived realism*"—a situation/scenario/whatever has to seem genuine rather than fabricated. William Goldman, commenting on his screenplay for the WWII epic movie **A Bridge Too Far***, remarked that the critics lambasted the film for casting actor Ryan O'Neal as General James Gavin, feeling the actor was too young to play a general. When he played the part, O'Neal was exactly the same age as Gavin during the battle, but Goldman says if he had inserted this fact as exposition ("You know, General Gavin is our youngest division commander"), people would have thought he had done it to justify the casting decision. General Gavin has been portrayed in several other movies, and he's always played by an actor 20 years or more older than he was at the time because it "seems" more realistic—after all, generals are old guys, everybody knows that.

People like to sneer at so-called "Hollywood" moments, but the real world is sometimes even more trite than the hoariest movie cliche.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Panned by one critic as being "*An Hour Too Long.*" I love the film, but that's because I can look at the long, lingering shots of paratroopers boarding aircraft and think "Wow,

lookit all the real DC-3s—where'd they get all of those?". I'm a WWII tech geek.

Apr 16, 2001, Starting Out

A recent thread on the **JTAS** discussion boards dealt with "*How did you start in gaming,*" and I thought my tale would be instructive. I got my start with board wargames while in grade school,* and progressed to miniatures while in high school. While in college, I fell in with the **Illinois State University** games club, and met the group that would found **GDW.** After being in business for less than a year, we received a visit from some members of the **U of I Game Club** (an hour's drive down the road) who introduced all of us to **Dungeons & Dragons.**

We spent a few weeks allowing the game to distract us heavily from work. We all found the games intensely fascinating, and were soon creating variant rules and increasingly complicated variations on the theme. It occurred to us that the general idea of roleplaying could be adapted to all sorts of situations, and proceeded to design *En Garde*, a game of social climbing and political machinations in a **Three Musketeers**-like universe.**

Eventually, we lost interest in fantasy games, and began to explore other backgrounds (**Traveller,** as we all know, was one result). We looked at all sorts of possibilities, but the discovery that people were interested in **Traveller** as a product line led us to concentrate our efforts on that game and set aside (in some cases permanently) other genres we were considering.

Many of the games saw print in later years, but by no means all—I sometimes wonder what kind of success we might have made out of our fantasy game (**Companions of the Road** was the working title)—but lately, I have become convinced that things have worked out pretty well.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My first wargame was titled **1863**, and came as a premium in **Life Magazine**—you cut out the pieces and glued them to cardboard and gamed out the campaigns of the year 1863 in the Civil War. It was later published as a conventional boxed game with injection-molded pieces and a cool map. This was followed circa 1964 by Avalon Hill's **Afrika Korps**.

** While all this was going on, we introduced **D&D** to other gamers who visited GDW. One of these took the game to Michigan, where he formed the group that (eventually) introduced James Dallas Egbert to the game. Egbert's disappearance from the **Michigan State University** campus in East Lansing catapulted **D&D** and roleplaying games to national attention—so in a way, it is all our fault.

Apr 23, 2001, Realism

I have noticed over the years that PCs in RPGs tend to exhibit behaviors that, in real life, would earn a medal for heroism. William Goldman* remarks in his book **Which Lie Did I Tell?** that what military heroes do maybe once or twice in a lifetime, action heroes do every day before breakfast. For some tales of real-life heroes, check out the **CMH's Medal of Honor** citations. For a start, I suggest Audie Murphy and Manyard Smith (I'm amazed Smith's wasn't posthumous). A little surfing will turn up equally impressive citations for other armies.

There's a reason for this—the vast majority of people do not go to movies because they want to see a slice of ordinary life (there are movies like this, but they generally don't do

too well at the box office). Movies are escapism. A lot of fiction, especially SF, is escapism. Roleplaying games are escapism, and it is easy to forget this, especially when trying to incorporate "realism" into game rules.

This all ties in with the "perceived realism" theme I've touched on before. It is more important that a game look and feel right than for it to actually be right to four decimal places. No RPG can completely simulate reality without being as complex as reality, and who wants that? Part of good design consists of the ability to pick what is important to concentrate on for a particular game. There have been games that attempt to simulate every detail of life with tables, page after page of charts, and mountains of dice. I began designing one almost 15 years ago (it was a game that was as near perfect a simulation of running a feudal manor as I could make it), and gave it up when it became obvious that no one, myself included, would ever want to play it. I did manage to make use of some of the research in later games, however (nothing is ever a complete waste)—you'd be surprised how much post-WWIII Poland and 11th-century France have in common . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of my favorite screenwriters (he did **Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid**, **Marathon Man** (book and movie), **All the President's Men**, **A Bridge Too Far**, and many more) is also an established writer (fiction and non-fiction), whose books on life in Hollywood** are excellent.
** **Adventures in the Screen Trade** and the aforementioned **Which Lie Did I Tell?**

Apr 30, 2001, Canon Counters*

I'd like to seize a topic from the **JTAS** discussion boards and run off into a corner with it: the question of whether or not the **Traveller** background has become too complex, and makes the game too hard for beginners to get "into." The problem is that as players and GMs become more devoted to the game, it becomes harder for outsiders to become involved with them. The "old-timers" resent the intrusion, and often make newcomers feel unwelcome without (always) intending to do so.

Actually, this sort of thing is not unique to **Traveller**, or even to roleplaying games—very few established groups welcome outsiders. There is a kind of "us and them" philosophy permeating fandoms of all sorts. Look at how SF fandom (aka "*fen*") views the rest of the population (aka "*mundanes*"), how miniatures-gaming groups view "civilians," or how a small town views a newcomer ("You must be the stranger."). Part of this is unintentional—almost every hobby has a certain basic knowledge base, and it takes a while for people to acquire it. Newcomers feel out of place because they lack the knowledge to fit in. Part of it is unconscious—people tend to associate with people and things familiar to them, so the newbie is snubbed, without it necessarily being intentional (I hate being a stranger at a dinner party, for example, especially among people who've known each other for years; I feel like I'm intruding somehow). New players don't know the rules, they don't know what's already been tried, what's been discussed to death. It seems like an insurmountable effort just to get them with the program. They will never appreciate the game on as many levels as we, the faithful followers of the one true way.

Some people welcome newcomers—as fresh meat. You've all seen this type in action: the wargamer who relishes a steady diet of new opponents as a means of showing his superior knowledge of the game, the *grognard* who likes to humiliate new RPGers by demonstrating his encyclopedic experience. I admit, to my shame, that I've done this in the past—I

took advantage of a new player's ignorance to drive him out of the gaming group (it bothers me a little to this day).

We have to realize that newcomers are not dangerous; a roleplaying-game group is not like a military platoon, where the "new guy" is liable to be dangerous until he learns the ropes. New players are the seed corn, the hope for the future of gaming—and we all were neophytes once. We have to exert a special effort to help new gamers fit in, to help them over feeling ignorant and clumsy and out of place—just like the person at a dinner party who makes a special effort to make a stranger feel accepted. Further, we have to realize that newcomers are more than just another way for us to demonstrate how well we know the game.

Traveller has one of the most fully-realized backgrounds in all of gaming—and that can be its greatest strength . . . if we break people in to it gradually. New players should be helped through the first few games until they begin to learn what we already know: **Traveller** is the greatest thing since sliced bread.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* A pun—those of us who are fascinated by military history, especially the organization and equipment of past wars, are sometimes disparagingly called "cannon counters" by devotees of other facets of the past.

May 07, 2001, Sports

First of all, Glenn Grant just told me that Jean-Pierre Normand won this year's **Aurora Award* for Artistic Achievement** this week-end at **V-Con**, in Burnaby, British Columbia. Glenn had been nominated in this category for his artwork in **SJ Games** products released in 2000. While it isn't the same as winning, there is a thrill to just being nominated**, and I'm sure I am not alone in congratulating Glenn for making it as far as he did. Maybe next year?

I'm not much interested in sports. Growing up in the time and place I did, I acquired a working knowledge of the rules for baseball and football (the American version thereof). My eyesight problems made it difficult for me to hit or catch any fast-moving object, so I wasn't especially good at baseball. I didn't have the right mental attitude for football (although I had the size for it). I was too large (too heavy) to play basketball, and never developed an interest in track (except for the javelin; I would have liked to have tried that in P.E., but our school didn't offer it). I seldom watch sporting events on TV. None of this, however, prevents me from speculating about sports in **Traveller.**

What present-day sports will survive to the future? From one point of view, none of them will. Three to five thousand years is a long time—we don't have the same sports the ancient Egyptians had, do we?

Well, yes, in a way, we do. The essence of sport is competition, and that part is certainly around. The rules have changed, and the equipment has gotten more sophisticated, but there is much about football/soccer/rugby/whatever that a Roman soldier from two millennia ago would instantly recognize. There have been "stick-and-ball" games for as long as there have been "inflated-pig's-bladder" games. It does not strain credulity for several of these games to survive for thousands of years in one form or another.

Speculation about future sports is not uncommon. Books and movies do it all the time, but they tend to assume that the old sports will not survive and something new, preferably involving some kind of high-tech invention, will have taken its place—rollerball (from the movie of the same name) is one example. **Traveller** writers are as guilty of this as anyone—

witness the many instances of "grav ball" that show up as throwaway references. Even these "new" sports, however, tend to be old sports dressed up with high tech; rollerball as shown in the movie is a combination of a couple of ball games and a Roman chariot race turned into a team sport. Grav ball (which has never been described) is presumably some variant of zero-G "inflated-pig's-bladder" game.

Which brings me to my final question, which I leave as an exercise for the reader: What was the most recent sport to be invented that requires a technological advance? I'd say the various forms of parachute-related sports (skydiving, parasailing, etc.), but I'm not sure that's correct.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Canada's fan-voted SF awards.
** I speak from personal experience here—I've been nominated for many more awards than I've actually won (and I have won a few over the years). It still feels good even to be nominated.

May 14, 2001, All That Old-Timey Stuff

This essay kind of rambles, so bear with me. People ask me, from time to time, what it is about history that fascinates me so much. As one of my nieces phrased it: "How come you like all that old-timey stuff so much?" **Traveller** fans may find it odd that I am at the same time interested in the sophisticated technology of the far future and the primitive technology of the far past.

For one thing, the far past is not as primitive as many people think it is. Let me quote a few examples:

There are numerous examples of Roman military records, mostly fragments of papyrus from the Egyptian garrison. One of these is a reasonably complete pay record for a soldier for a three-month period. It indicates what he was paid and what was deducted for such things as the mandatory deposit to the unit savings account, his contribution to the burial fund (a form of insurance policy), deductions for his clothing, and stoppages because he had gotten into a fight and broken up a bar. What I find most amazing about this document is that at the bottom is a clerk's notation that this is the copy for the unit headquarters, and that another copy goes to the soldier and yet another to the provincial capital archives . . .

Many contracts and legal documents survive from the Greco-Roman period, and they indicate a legal sophistication many people think did not exist until the 19th century.

Rome again: When **St Peter's** was built (or rebuilt) in the 16th century, one of the things that needed to be done was to move an enormous obelisk a few hundred feet. The engineers in charge of the project felt it was such a wondrous feat of engineering that they set up a plaque on the base, telling who was involved in moving a 600-ton block of stone that great distance. One doesn't want to belittle their efforts, but the obelisk had originally come from Egypt and was moved to Rome under the early emperors. They took a 600-ton stone obelisk, moved it to a barge on the Nile, sailed it across the Mediterranean and up the Tiber, took it off the barge, and finally carried it from the river front to its final position on the **Forum**—without breaking it. All of this was done without any power source other than wind and muscle. This would be a considerable engineering problem today, but the Romans didn't seem to think it was anything that special.

We all know of the cities of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, but they were not alone. The cities of the Indus Valley—Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, among others—had extremely

sophisticated town plans, brick-lined sewer and drainage ditches, and public baths . . . all about 2,000 B.C. Most people think "plumbing" and "B.C." do not go together.

In North America, there was a city of 20,000 people built within 10 miles of where St. Louis would be 1,000 years later. Cahokia (as we call it) was built by the little-known Mississippian culture that flourished in the American Midwest about A.D. 800-1400 (formerly known as the "Mound Builders," for their burial mounds) and vanished for reasons now unknown. A city of 20,000 in Europe in the Middle Ages would have been a sizable community; Cahokia was the largest city north of the Rio Grande until well into the Colonial period, and Illinois would not see anything that large until the 1800s. **Monk's Mound,** the dominant feature of the city, is larger in its base dimensions than the **Great Pyramid** at Giza.*

I have always found an enormous sense of wonder in my study of the past. Our ancestors—even those of the Bronze Age—were as intelligent and (in their own way) as sophisticated as we are. Next time a band of adventurers land on a **TL0** world, surprise them with a huge metropolitan complex . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* And requires quite an effort to climb to its summit, as I can testify from personal experience. You can stand on top of it (panting) and see the **Gateway Arch** in St. Louis, without binoculars.

May 21, 2001, Hindsight?

One commercial for a car company that is currently running in the **U.S.** shows people driving along lip-synching to the lyrics "I wish that I knew what I know now, when I was younger . . .".* This is a common sentiment and I occasionally think along these lines myself. But people mean different things when they say things like that. Usually, they wish they could revisit some important decision with the benefit of years of experience and more mature judgment. Or they wish they could take back something hurtful they said or did. Or they wish they could bet their life savings on the last few **Superbowls**, or make a killing in the stock market, or sell their coin collection when silver was $40 an ounce. As I say, I've had similar thoughts, but each time, I come to the same conclusion reached by **Peanuts' Charlie Brown.** When asked, "Would you do anything differently if you knew then what you know now?" Charlie answered with another question: "What do I know now?"

I'll admit I am considerably more experienced now than I was when I was 18. In some ways, I'm smarter, and I am certainly wiser. I was a bit of a jerk in those days—a pompous git who knew something about everything, and couldn't wait to tell you about it (I like to think I have improved that aspect of my personality since). I've gained considerable experience as a writer and game designer. I've said a few hurtful things in my life I wish I hadn't. I've done a few seriously dumb things I wish I hadn't. In general, however, I'd be hesitant to try for a second chance at life—at least, not without a chance to return to the status quo if I messed things up even worse. One of the things I know now is that I could have done a lot worse, and I'm partly afraid that if I got a second chance, I might blow it. This is also a common theme in books, movies, and TV: "You aren't as bad off as you think you are." I think it is often overdone, but is essentially correct. Life doesn't have an undo command—all we can do is try to course-correct after the fact. We can't go back in time and buy IBM at $0.49 a share or save the shoebox of Mickey Mantle rookie cards that mom tossed when we went to college, or take back what we said, or say what we should have said. While hindsight may

be 20/20, foresight remains as murky as ever—even if we could do things over, there's no guarantee they'll turn out any better the second time through.

I think this is what attracts some people to wargaming: you get to go back and rethink some critical decisions of the great generals (within the limits of the game). You get to have full run of all the potentials and what-ifs and if-onlys in history. It is very therapeutic and somewhat cathartic.

So, seriously, what do I wish I could do over? Very few things, and most of them are irrelevant to **Traveller.** As far as gaming goes, I'd want to give the Third Imperium a more open, unexplored frontier, at least along one side. I wish we could have coordinated things a little better, and made the game a little more successful. I'd like to have been able to make better use of the Internet in its early days. And I wish I hadn't paid good money to see **Alien 3** in the theater—what a waste of $7.50 (but that's another article).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Evidently, this is from a recent (within the last 20 years) popular song, but I have no clue what it is. My musical tastes lean toward earlier days, so I am not up on current popular tunes—by which I mean that I don't care for much that was written since 1890 (with rare exceptions). Those interested in the details of my taste in music should see my personal Web page, where I deal with the matter in some detail.

May 27, 2001, Rumors 2001

Continuing in my series of "*Why the Internet Isn't What It's Cracked Up To Be*" essays:

The Internet provides a means for people to get together on a global scale. Folks thousands of miles apart can chat, swap e-mail, and generally do what used to be known as "shooting the breeze." Today, I have exchanged e-mails with people as far apart as New Zealand, the UK, Germany, and Ohio. This is a nice thing that has made it easy to exchange cultural and political views, game ideas, news, and other items of mutual interest. There are many good things about this arrangement, but I won't talk about those (I favor the widest possible discussion of views and opinions*—provided it is a polite and intelligent discussion, not an argument).

One thing I don't like about the Internet is how easily rumors can spread. Rumors have always spread fast. Even before telephones and telegraphs, they could spread like wildfire ("*A lie can runaround the world before the truth can get its boots on.*"—James Watt), but the Internet has sped them up by several orders of magnitude. People like to think they are well-informed in their particular field of interest. People also like to use knowledge to impress others and make themselves feel like part of an elite group. I've done this myself. But people also tend to (often quite accidentally) embroider, inflate, conflate, confabulate, misremember, misinterpret, and generally mutate stories beyond all recognition. Remember that party game where everyone sits in a circle and whispers a short story from person to person?

I don't spread rumors, because I am convinced that Internet rumors were a significant factor in causing **GDW** to go out of business. This isn't the place to go into that topic, but I would like to demonstrate how a rumor can spread by using

a recent example from the **JTAS** discussion boards.

A recent rumor held that **SJ Games** was about to lose the **GURPS Traveller** license, and one of our subscribers, seeking to know the truth, posted the question on our discussion board. As near as I can determine, the rumor started when someone (or more likely several someones—it is not important who or how many) noted a press release issued by

Marc in 1999,which said that the GT license had been extended to December 2002, and took this to mean that the license would not be renewed after that date. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course (and this was not what Marc intended by the press release), but after passing through several chat rooms and mailing lists and so on, this statement mutated into "the license is doomed." I think this rumor has been pretty much squelched by a couple of judicious messages on the **JTAS** board, to the **TML**, and in a couple of other places. This process was helped by the fact that people came directly to me and asked— which brings me to my final point:

Years ago, nobody ever asked me about the rumors that were circulating. Fans would discuss the rumors among themselves, and would seek out other "well-informed" fans in an attempt to determine the truth of a given story, but no one ever asked "the source"—no one ever asked **GDW**. I never understood this philosophy, although people tell me it is true of other fandoms as well. Those who are "in the know" are seen as being unapproachable people who might take umbrage at being questioned. At least this seems to have changed, as the contents of my inbox will demonstrate.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

*The First Amendment to the **U.S. Constitution** is among my favorites—it covers a lot of ground, but the right to say pretty much any crazy thing I like is an important one, right up there with the right to peaceably assemble and a couple of others.

Jun 02, 2001, Certain Things

Certain things tend to repeat themselves, and I have recently had cause to recall a very clear and very humorous demonstration of this. This is not directly related to **Traveller,** but it does involve **GDW** and it illustrates how certain mindsets can get stuck in a rut, so I think it might have some application to some RPG situations.

Almost every weapon system undergoes a lengthy procurement process, during which it is criticized for various deficiencies and compared to the existing system. The existing system is perfect, of course, despite the fact that it too went through a similar phase when it was new and untried. Our non-U.S. readers will forgive me if I use an example from the U.S. military. I ask the indulgence of all the readership if I cannot quote specific sources—I am writing this editorial from memory, and do not have access to references:

One of the criticisms of the M-16 series was that the weapon was capable of fully-automatic fire—the contention being that soldiers would be tempted to use that form of fire exclusively, and soon shoot off all their ammunition. The staff of **GDW** were wargamers, and thus familiar with weapons development over the years. Marc Miller was (and still is) a firearms enthusiast. We all knew that the same argument (among others) had been used against the adoption of the M1 Garand at the start of WWII. The M1 was a semiautomatic rifle, which meant that one round was fired each time the trigger was pulled. The M1 was intended to replace the M-1903 Springfield, which was a bolt-action weapon requiring the firer to work a bolt to chamber each new round from a small, internal magazine (holding five cartridges).

With me so far? When Frank Chadwick was doing research for **Space: 1889,** he ran across an article from a period magazine (I want to say it was **Harper's Weekly**, but I don't remember) dealing with the history of military firearms up to 1885. This was about the time when magazine rifles (such as the later M-1903 Springfield) were beginning to re-place earlier single-shot, bolt-action weapons, which required the firer to open the bolt

(thereby ejecting the spent cartridge case) and insert a fresh cartridge by hand. The new weapons had their critics, and a common argument was that the soldier could now fire much faster than before, making it tempting to shoot off all of his ammunition. Many early magazine rifles were designed with a "cutoff," so that a soldier still loaded one round at a time, but could use the internal magazine as a "reserve" for rapid fire during attacks. The author thought this was a silly notion, and had assembled documentation showing that one criticism of breech-loading rifles was that soldiers would waste ammunition by firing too fast. He concluded his argument with a statement that "many authorities feel that soldiers should be encouraged to fire their weapons, not impeded from it."

The final note: **Hero of Alexandria**, writing in the first century B.C., noted the invention of a hand-cranked, repeating-fire, arrow-throwing catapult, which he dismissed with the notion that untrained soldiers would fire off all their arrows.

I think it says much about the mindset and worldview of weapons-procurement officers that the same argument keeps cropping up again and again. All of the new weapons had flaws when they were initially put forward, and all of them had features that were perceived as flaws by some. But I find the fact that the same argument arises repeatedly, over the centuries, to be risible.

What is the relevance to **Traveller**? I quote this as further proof, if any is needed, that some aspects of the human character do not change, even over millennia. It is further evidence of my long-held contention that at least some features of society will remain recognizable even in the far future.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 11, 2001, Top 10

I don't know who originated the custom of listing things by tens, but it has been popular for at least 60 years.* What I propose to do this week is present an annotated list of the ten things I find most annoying about modern life. Some of these are related to computers, and I am under no illusion that these are shared by anyone else. Here they are, in no particular order:

Websites that open a dozen new browser windows, and refuse to return control of the stop or back buttons to me for several minutes while they insist that I must immediately go to another website and download a program that will enable me to watch a 30-second commercial.

E-tailers who have assembled a list of "suggested products" for my shopping convenience. This sort of thing is a modern updating of the store owner who knew each customer by name and remembered individual interests. The algorithm still needs some work, however, because what the program "recommends" for me is seldom something I'm interested in. The best of a bad lot is whatever software Amazon.com is using, which manages to identify something that piques my interest about one time in five (sometimes it is even something I already own). Most

of the time the program's suggestions are of no interest to me whatsoever. This is a nice idea, but it needs a lot more work.

People who open packages at retail stores. I run into this as a customer quite a bit, and used to encounter it when I was working the sales side as well—people would rip open a package containing (for example) a printer cable to inspect the contents, then take an unopened package off the shelf to purchase it.

Automated machines that call to leave advertising messages on my answering ma-

chine.

Whoever or whatever it is that periodically calls me and leaves several two-second bursts of static on my answering machine . . . every 10 minutes for the entire afternoon. This happens every two or three months, and is not quite irritating enough for me to complain to the phone company. Yet.

People who leave takeout menus or other advertising on my doorknob. Salesmen who refuse to take "no" for an answer.

Computer-inexperienced relatives who e-mail me every urban-legend "virus warning" spam that comes their way. The unspoken assumption that I want/need/will instantly buy the absolute latest version of whatever software I own, regardless of whether or not it works as well (for my purposes) as the version I am currently using. Architects and city planners who assume that, because I do not drive, I am unworthy of their consideration.

What is the relevance to **Traveller** or gaming? There isn't one—except the observation that what is often trumpeted as "for your convenience" or "an advance" usually isn't anything of the kind.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The **Federal Bureau of Investigation** has one of the oldest uses of the "*top 10*" that I can think of, but I'm not at all certain they originated the custom.

Jun 18, 2001, Singularity

I am not a mathematician—I occasionally refer to myself as functionally innumerate—and I can barely handle the basic four functions,* let alone anything more complex (I had two years of algebra in high school and have managed to avoid anything requiring higher mathematics since that time). I use a spreadsheet to balance my checkbook, and I have trouble even understanding what calculus deals with. I managed to make it through my high-school physics courses only by bullheaded determination. For this reason, the true technogeeks among my readers will probably be convulsed by fits of laughter at my ham-handed discussion of the concept of a Vingean Singularity. I will refer readers with a grasp of mathematics exceeding my own elsewhere for a discussion of the topic in far greater rigor than I am capable of (it explains why it is named after science fiction author Vernor Vinge, and goes into the difference between exponential and hyperbolic progressions, which makes my head hurt just thinking about it), and why what Vinge is talking about is not really a singularity in the mathematical/physical/astronomical sense. The notion is not original with Vinge: John von Neumann, in the 1950s, said "the ever-accelerating progress of technology . . . gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue."

What I want to ask is this: Have we ever had one of these before? Have we ever had a change in society so radical as to be completely incomprehensible to people (the "end of society as we know it")? I'm having trouble thinking of one. Agriculture? Fire? Tool use? Walking upright?

As the modern world encountered the less-developed world in the 20th Century, there were cases of people going from what was essentially a stone-age society to modern technology in less than a generation. World War II brought modern technology to the peoples of the South Pacific, and they did not seem to have missed a stride in the progression from stone knives to cell phones. A point could be made that they do not really comprehend the technology behind their new gadgets—perhaps even viewing them as "magic"—but I

submit that a significant number of people in the U.S. do not comprehend their gadgets. To my father, a microwave was effectively magic. He knew how radio worked, and knew what radar was, but the application of electromagnetic waves to heating his coffee went over his head. How many of you know people for whom the computer is a black (well, beige, actually) box?

The reason I bring this up is that **Traveller** is often criticized for failing to take this into account—society 5,000 years in the future will be completely incomprehensible to the average human being today, it is said. I'm not completely convinced—there are many changes that have come about since 3000 B.C., but some things haven't changed all that much. Let's wait a few years and see . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Unlike my father, who could extract square roots in his head. I did not inherit this ability; I can barely multiply two-digit numbers in my head, and I need a calculator or a sheet of paper for division.

Jun 18, 2001, This Issue Is Light

I apologize for the light issue this week ... we've been experiencing some temporary trouble with the ISP for several days, and all the **SJ Games** websites have been alternately down and up all day. As I write this, I can't be certain the magazine will appear on schedule, but rest assured we will get everything posted as soon as we can!

Loren Wiseman,
Editor, **JTAS**

Jul 02, 2001, Murphy in Action?

Last week, I had another demonstration of how one little thing can bring almost everything else to a screeching halt. Our usually reliable ISP, **Illuminati Online**, was moving equipment and experienced some problems—which meant that all of the office e-mail and all the websites were highly unreliable. They were down most of Sunday, and operating only sporadically until Tuesday of last week. I had uploaded two articles before the interruption, and last Monday I managed to get a short editorial through. As it happens, enough machinery was operating at the proper time that the magazine went up on schedule . . . but missing a proper editorial, one complete article, and a poll (the previous week's simply carried over). But everything eventually got straightened out, and I then plowed my way through the couple of hundred e-mails that had stacked up.

We'll be making up the article shortfall within a couple of weeks, by the simple expedient of running an issue with four articles instead of three, so it will all work out in the end.

Working in an office without Web access and without e-mail meant that certain things simply could not get done. Much of my administrative correspondence for the **Traveller** line is done via e-mail. Most of the people that I correspond with know my address on AOL as well, and little communication was actually lost, but without a working connection at the office, I could not access AOL either, and some people do not know my AOL address. One small example:

I will be attending **Dragoncon** in Atlanta, Georgia over Labor Day weekend (early in September, for our non-U.S. readers), as a guest of the convention. The e-mail crash meant

that I was delayed in working out the final details of the flight from Austin to Atlanta, and getting the preferences for my hotel room to the people who are in charge of VIPs at the con. I hope the week's delay doesn't mess anything up, especially this close to the convention date (as everyone knows, the closer things get to the last minute, the greater the chances of something going wrong). So, like a giant chain of dominoes, it is possible that the lack of e-mail in late June 2001 might create problems for me in September.

Another example, farther back in time and not related to our ISP: Earlier this year, the Houston, Texas area received a year's worth of rain in a few days. Many areas flooded, and property damage was great. Among the things damaged were the central computers for a major American ATM system. This meant that for several days, I could not get cash at the convenience store across the street—I had to make a special trip to my bank (20 minutes each way by bus) to get pocket money.

There are those who believe that the modern world is too complex, too interconnected, and too vulnerable to small accidents (the Y2K concern brought a lot of these people to the foreground, but they have since receded).

The lesson is that society needs alternatives and backups. You need to anticipate the unexpected* and have contingency plans. This is nothing new, of course—it was true in the neolithic, and it will be true 5,000 years in the future.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Which brings up another question—if you can anticipate it, is it really unexpected?

Jul 09, 2001, Sic(k) Semper Computer

First, some news: as of this issue, **JTAS** will be going biweekly. This is mainly because **SJ Games** is undergoing a financial retrenchment and reorganization. The editorial staff (Monica Stephens and I) will be taking on additional duties, which will require us to cut back on the time we can devote to **JTAS**. Nobody here at **SJ Games** wants the quality of the magazine to suffer. If we run half as many articles, the average quality should actually go up, which is not a bad thing.

Current subscribers will have their remaining subscriptions extended so everyone gets the same number of issues. We will be adjusting the subscription rate for all new subscribers and for renewals . . . it will still be $15 for 52 issues, which will last twice as long, since $7.50 is not really practical for us to charge.

I still need articles and authors to write them. I hope you will all stay with us through this time, and help us over the rough spots.

Sic(k) Semper Computer

My comments on modern society and how vulnerable we are to interruptions in it seem to have tempted fate: my home machine has ceased functioning. I think it is a case of power not getting to the monitor, but you never know about these things.* I'm going to bring it into the office for a consultation with Sage (the resident techogeek), and I hope it is something simple and easily remedied.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For those who care, my home machine is a **Compaq Presario 4402**, which has CPU and monitor all in one huge case. How I got it is a story in itself: In the days when I was

selling computers for a national office-supply chain (between **GDW** and **SJ Games),** my manager offered me a computer at store cost if I could get it running—the machine had been returned several times. I opened the case, saw that the cable connecting the hard drive to the rest of the machine was partly dislodged (probably shaken loose during shipping), and pressed it back into place. I closed the case and it hasn't given me a bit of trouble until the present time.

Aug 01, 2001, Overeducated?

Years ago, Frank Chadwick created a document we immediately labeled "***Famous Game Designers School, Lesson 2: The Importance of Adequate Sleep***," and posted on the office bulletin board. This document was written in the small hours of the morning, after he had been awake and writing for 30+ hours. The document itself was titled "***Horsey Maintenance***," and purported to deal with various aspects of the treatment of equines in **Twilight: 2000**. The rule started out okay, but became increasingly incoherent as it progressed. The last few paragraphs described Frank's discovery that the shift key on his computer keyboard was sticking, and how this made him look like he was imitating e.e. cummings, which led to a long rambling dissertation that had nothing to do with horses. (e.e. cummings, for those who don't know, was a poet* who experimented with grammar and punctuation, and who has spawned a legion of people who insist on signing their names in lower case because it is tres chic.)

The reason I bring this up is a recent event: I "pulled an all-nighter" as we used to say in college, and discovered (to my chagrin) that everything I had written after about 3 a.m. had to be heavily reworked the next day. Sometimes, even we seasoned professionals forget the basics . . . which, I suppose, can serve as Lesson 3.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Poetry is a taste I never acquired—I read it when required by my school literature classes,** but I never developed a huge fondness for it.

** I've found, over the years, that much of my education was put to no good use—I haven't had to write anything in iambic pentameter or needed to solve a quadratic equation since I graduated college.

On the other hand, I do seem to have gravitated to an industry where a huge storehouse of little snippets of knowledge is a real benefit. **Traveller r**equires a nodding acquaintance with many disciplines. It is the perfect sanctuary for a know-it-all (I'm a recovering know-it-all, actually, but it still counts). I know, for example, that e.e. cummings was also a painter, served in WWI, and that he is often confused with Don Marquis,*** who also wrote without using a shift key. I think the reason lies in the fact that RPGs attract people who are widely read.

*** Of archy and mehitibel fame. I'll leave the investigation of who archy and mehitibel were as an exercise for the reader.

Aug 01, 2001, Good Things and Bad Things

Cellular phones have exploded in popularity in the last few years. I'm not sure if this is a good thing or a bad thing. Certainly it has made it possible for people to conduct business from increasingly remote places. Like every new technology, it has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are fairly obvious.

As for the disadvantages, I have witnessed bus passengers (I ride public transportation a great deal, having no car) become so distracted during cell-phone conversations that they miss their stop. I have seen one pedestrian become so agitated during a cell-phone conversation that she gestured violently and accidentally struck a passerby. The equipment is getting smaller. I recently watched one of my own predictions come true: I saw a woman walk down an aisle in a supermarket talking to herself—then I realized she had a nearly invisible headset phone. Other customers (who could not see the side of her head where the tiny headset was) were staring at her as if she were mentally unbalanced. What will things be like when the phone is small enough to be enclosed in eyeglasses, or implanted subdermally . . . and when the so-called "wearable computer" becomes as commonplace as the cellular phone is now.

It is common to blame auto accidents on "cell phone distraction" nowadays. I saw a recent newscast that said a study indicated that cell phones were not responsible for as many automobile accidents as had originally been suspected. I don't remember who conducted the study or the details behind it, so I have no idea how reliable it is. How many distractions will the wearable computer cause?

Fortunately for many, I think that advancing technology will provide a solution in the form of the computer-controlled automobile. Automobiles already incorporate computers, and the trend is increasing. Soon, an on-board computer will intervene if the driver is about to drive off a precipice or run down a pedestrian. The computer will (presumably) recognize unauthorized drivers, after which the percentage of two-year-olds putting a car in gear and backing into the street will drop.

Given the way that human nature works, however, I don't think everyone will be completely happy with the computer-controlled car. I am almost certain that the government will insist that the on-board computers be programmed to obey traffic regulations. I am 100% certain that many drivers will be unhappy at being forced to obey certain traffic laws (like speed limits and no-passing zones). I suspect that once computer-controlled cars become the norm, there will be a vast aftermarket in chips that allow you to "customize" your car's driving habits to suit your personal quirks (just as there are "kits" to circumvent pollution-control devices).

There is, in addition, the whole question of personal privacy: If the car can drive itself, it is not much of a step to program the car to remember everywhere it has been (especially if GPS technology is present). Will we ever see a time when your own car reports you to the police for speeding? When your spouse's divorce lawyer subpoenas your car to testify on how many times you visited the No-Tell Motel? When your parents can command your car not to take you to certain destinations?

I hope at least one of the world's automakers is considering all the implications—somehow, however, I suspect not.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Aug 20, 2001, Trudging to Curmudgeonhood

Like many of my generation, as I get older, I am disturbed by the growing resemblance I have to my father. Dad used to grumble about all sorts of things, complaining about how different things had become, and prefacing every sentence with something like "In my day . . ." I have always looked forward to the future. I am, in general, an optimist, and I think that the time to come is going to be a vastly interesting one. On the other hand, I can foresee a number of things that are definitely going to make me increasingly grumpy as the years go

by. Of those which are more or less technology-related:

Telemarketing. It is a rare day that I arrive home and not find at least two messages on my machine (usually five or more), deposited there by a computer representing a satellite-TV company, or a cable-TV company, or a home-siding company, all wanting to sell me their product. The calls involving large (presumably nationwide) firms are less of an annoyance these days, because their machines are sophisticated enough to detect my answering machine and hang up without leaving any trace of their call. This does not, however, remove me from their calling list—it just recycles my number back into the queue to be called again later. I am told that companies persist in telemarketing because it has the highest rate of return for their money. That doesn't make it any less annoying. The advent of caller ID has meant that I can end up on a company's solicit list simply by calling them (or someone they share lists with)—unless I choose to pay extra to the phone company for caller ID blocking. I am irritated that the phone companies originally advertised caller ID as a means of avoiding unwanted calls (and implied it would be available free to all customers).

Even having an unlisted number will not protect you—automated dialing programs are now set up to call every number in a given exchange (555-0001, 555-0002, etc.), drop fax and modem answers from the list, and hand off any living human answer to a salesman.

Spam.* This is a slightly different form of the same thing I mentioned under telemarketing—the vast majority of spam is either trying to sell me something or trying to induce me to go to some website (where I will undoubtedly be given the opportunity to send money somewhere). While I have no proof, I assume the low cost of this form of "advertising" makes it profitable even with microscopically low rates of response. Unlike "direct mail" advertisers (who will usually stop mailing you things eventually), spam seems endless, and even erasing it unread is getting to be a hassle. Sometimes my relatives change e-mail addresses, and if they send me a note with a subject line like "Hi!" or "you gotta see this!" I delete it unread—which means I sometimes miss family messages.

The Internet continues to be tantalizingly disappointing, and I see no reason to believe it will get any better. I am disappointed in the Internet because of the signal-to-noise ratio (it takes great care to separate the few grains of wheat from the tons of chaff out there). I am even more disappointed, however, with people who seem to think it is the only research tool they need. I am amazed at the number of people who still believe that the totality of human knowledge is only a couple of mouse-clicks away. I have a close friend who teaches at a state university, and he has been bemoaning the lack of scholarship among even his graduate students for many years, but only recently has he encountered students who resist any research they cannot do from their home computer. If it involves physically going to a library, they feel themselves ill-used.

I am the first to admit I would very much like to be able to see every item in the **Library of Congress, British Museum**, and **Regenstein** from home—but sadly, we aren't there yet (although we are tantalizingly close), and it is still mildly annoying. Of course, I used to complain that the **Randolph Township Library** didn't have Pauly Wissowa's *Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* . . . (it's on a set of compact disks now, but I can't afford it—and my need for it is less than it once was).

Also, my inability to win millions in the lottery is a source of continuing annoyance.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The nice folks at **Hormel Foods** have announced that they prefer people to use the word "spam" as a euphemism for unwanted e-mail, and "SPAM" (all caps) when referring to their canned luncheon meat.

Aug 30, 2001, Two Things 2001

There are few things you can count on, but one of them is this: If you use a real-world fact in an SF RPG, the odds are that the instant the product goes to press, that fact will be invalidated, expanded, or totally replaced. For historical games, this is less true—new discoveries are made from time to time, but the main thing that changes in the study of the Roman Empire (to pick a subject at random) is interpretation—historians seldom discover an entirely new continent, for example.

SF games deal in fictional worlds . . . but the authors of them are no better at predicting the future than ordinary SF writers—which is to say, not very.* In the 24+ years since **Traveller** originally came out, for example, the number of known extra-solar planets (planets orbiting stars other than Sol) has gone from zero to many (notice the clever trick to keep this column from being outdated). The number of known planetoids increases every year, and the total number of moons in the system jumped radically with the Voyager probes (not to mention knowledge of the specifics of the outer system).

There are two schools of thought on what to do about this sort of thing.** You either change the game to reflect the new discoveries, or you do not. Which way you go depends on the nature of the discovery and the nature of the game (and you, the designer, will be criticized no matter which choice you make). Take, for example, the case of another **GDW** game, **2300 AD.** The game included a map of all stars within 50 light-years of Earth—the "***Near Star List,***" based on the best available data we had at the time (I say "we" when I mean "Marc and Frank"; I had little to do with the design of that part of the game). On this star map, we overlaid our fictional universe, adding worlds and planetoids, interstellar trade routes, settlements, and so on, forming a "geography" for the game. Politics, economics, military campaigns, and many other things were linked to this map, and it was the key to the game's background.

In the years since the game was published, new discoveries changed this map (don't ask me precisely how; I haven't kept up on the details . . . although I'm sure there are **JTAS** subscribers who can provide a detailed, point-by-point comparison). As changes accumulated, there were calls to change the map, which led to a debate that continues to this day. On the one side are those who feel the game should reflect existing reality, since the game purports to be the "real" universe carried 300 years into the future (actually, it is the same universe as **GDW**'s **Twilight: 2000** game, which brings up another debate I won't go into). There is great satisfaction to be derived from a game that deals with the real world, real stars, real planets, and a real future. The people supporting this view feel that the game map should change with every new discovery, and what it does to the background must take a secondary status.

The opposing viewpoint is that extensive changes to the map will radically alter the "geography" of the game, requiring massive changes to the history, politics, and economics of the game. These people like the existing game setting, and do not want to casually discard three centuries of interwoven and coherent background every time a new star is discovered.

Neither side is right—or wrong. This is a matter of opinion, and ties in with a common theme of mine, that of perceived reality. To some, the political, economic, historical, and cultural interactions of the game are of paramount importance. This is what they enjoy most about the game, and they do not want it to change; that would be a different and (possibly) less enjoyable game. It would be like adding a new continent in the middle of the Atlantic. Others relish the thrill of getting every detail of the game to match the real world. Both sides want the game to "feel right," and both sides have a different definition of what that means. A game that doesn't feel right is not much fun, and having fun is the whole point of the exercise.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Who are about as accurate as the TV weatherman (says David Brin).

** Every time I hear someone say, "There are two schools of thought . . .", I am reminded of a quotation from Cecil Adams' **Straight Dope Books**: "*There are two schools of thought concerning Nostradamus ...* " I leave discovering the remainder of the quote as an exercise for the reader.

Sep 17, 2001, Background and Rules

I was at **Dragon-Con** in Atlanta, Georgia recently, where (among other things) I served on a panel discussing game design. There were many attendees and many thought-provoking questions. One of these was (I paraphrase slightly), "What is the relationship between rule mechanics and background?" This is a complicated question, and we discussed it for quite some time without coming to a real conclusion. Here are my thoughts on the subject:

First of all, I think prospective game designers should create the background first. I believe that most of the enjoyment derived from playing a game is from character interaction with the background, and therefore background is of primary importance. A rich, well-developed background is what keeps people playing a game again and again, and it is worth taking some time to develop properly.

Once the background is worked out (or mostly worked out—you can have considerable overlap between rules and background development), the designer should proceed to the rules.

The main question is: are you going to create a totally new set of rules mechanics for this game or will you adapt existing rules? The main advantage to adapting existing mechanics is that players will be familiar with them, and are more likely to play your game if they don't have to learn totally new rules. It is also valuable if the designer is familiar with the mechanics, but this is less important. Weighed against this is the question of how well the existing rules mechanics reflect the details of the background.

Consider the case of **GDW**'s game Twilight: 2000—the background dictates that combat will be a major component of adventures, and that the combat will concentrate on modern weapons (primarily small arms). We chose to create a new set of mechanics for this game to reflect the emphasis on firearms combat, and went into considerable detail—more so than would have been necessary (or justifiable) in a different setting. **The Twilight: 2000** mechanics covered melee combat, but melee combat did not receive the same attention as small-arms combat because it was a lesser emphasis. **The Twilight: 2000** rules mechanics work well with the background because they are designed to emphasize what the background concentrates on. Attempting to use those same mechanics for a medievalesque fantasy setting would require considerable modification to them, because missile weapons such as firearms take a back seat to melee combat in most fantasy settings. **Twilight: 2000** differentiated between many varieties of small arms and support weapons. Our hypothetical fantasy game should focus less on ranged weapons (if we are to be true to the genre) and concentrate on melee. We would need to heavily revise the **Twilight: 2000** melee mechanics to reflect the myriad styles and weapons used in hand-to-hand combat. This is possible (indeed I did some preliminary work along these lines for an unpublished time-travel game I was once tinkering with), but I think it might be worth looking at a different rules system, all things being equal.

Of course, all things are seldom equal. A designer working for a game company might

want to use a "house" system because he and the prospective players are familiar with it. If the existing system is sufficiently flexible, then it should simply be a matter of making a few tweaks to adapt it to a given milieu. A designer working independently may be limited by intellectual property issues that prevent him from using a particular set of rules mechanics. Another consideration is the designer's individual talents and preferences. Personally, I am not very good at creating new rules systems,* so I prefer to adapt existing ones so I can concentrate on what I consider the fun part: developing background.

This is another one of those situations where there is no right or wrong answer, only personal opinions influenced by experience and judgment. As Mark Twain once said, "*My habits protect me, but they might assassinate you.*"

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My friend Frank Chadwick, however, can design new rules systems in his sleep—and sometimes has.

P.S.—The tragic events of September 11th have stunned all of us. Here are a few places to go to find out what you can do:

The American Red Cross website has links for information about blood and monetary donations. They can also be reached at 1-800-448-3543.

The **U.S. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)** has news and links on where to make monetary donations.

To make a monetary donation through **Amazon's Honor System**, click here.

Oct 01, 2001, Birds, Steamboats, and Stars

I had originally intended to write an editorial about the events of September 11th and my reaction to them, but John Kovalic beat me to it. He said what I had intended to say, and I doubt I could have said it quite so well. Go to the **Dork Tower** website and read the "**Muskrat Ramblings**" for Monday, September 17. I felt tears welling up in my eyes as I read it—perhaps you will, too.

Reflecting on John's essay led me to thoughts of aircraft in general. My friend and former boss, Frank Chadwick, used to love to watch airplanes. Whenever **GDW** had to fly somewhere, he would always be found standing next to a window, watching planes take off and land. He once told me that he considered it a miracle that they stayed airborne, even though he understood the physics behind it. On an intellectual level, he knew why they could fly—Bernoulli's principle, lift/gravity, thrust/drag, and all that—but on a gut level, it was still a miraculous thing.*

In the 19th century, steamboats and railroads attracted similar enthusiasts. Later in that century, and in the early 20th, automobiles and then airplanes replaced them, but after the passage of time, these various wonders came to seem mundane to all but a few of us.

My grandfather didn't understand television, but he knew automobile engines pretty well. My father knew electronics well enough to build and repair radios and televisions, but microwave ovens left him puzzled and computers were magic boxes as far as he was concerned.

There is a line from **Inherit the Wind** (Spencer Tracy delivers it in the classic movie, and I paraphrase it here): "*I sometimes think there's a divine accountant with a huge balance sheet—'OK, you can have the airplane . . . but the birds will lose their wonder, and the clouds will smell of gasoline.'*" I have a suspicion that with widespread interstellar travel, something similar will happen to the stars—and I also think there will be "starship spotters" who'll

hang around the tarmac with a notebook computer, saying things like, "Wow! There's the Lucky Credit . . . I didn't think she ever made it this far coreward! Let's go get some pics."

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I share with him some of this feeling. I like to watch planes take off and land, especially large ones. I once saw a C-5A take off out of Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio. Something that looks like it could blot out the moon as it passed overhead jumped off the ground and flew out of sight in a few minutes. I'm not a "plane spotter"—I just like to watch them fly. One of the things I inherited from my father was an appreciation of the beauty of a well-oiled, properly tuned machine.

Oct 15, 2001, Nemesis

Note: This week's issue will be delayed 24 hours because of staff illness. We're running the editorial on time, and will add the articles tomorrow.

Years ago, when **Star Wars** premiered (and God and I were in school together—he was a senior when I was a freshman), I was discussing the ending with a group of friends and casual acquaintances. One person I didn't know well had a tendency to overanalyze films to the point of inducing boredom,* and held forth for quite some time on the significance of the ending, where Darth Vader is shown recovering control of his fighter, and zooming off. This person's analysis boiled down to the statement "Evil can be defeated, but it can never be destroyed."**

Which brings me to my topic: the concept of a nemesis is something I think is underutilized in games. Bad guys show up from time to time, but they seem to have no rhyme or reason for opposing the adventurers' actions, aside from pure contrariness. They blunder on-stage, do their dirty work, and the group deals with them before the adventure is over—what a yawner. Rather than a villain *du jour,* changing every few adventures, more GMs should give their players a nemesis. A nemesis (for the purposes of this discussion) is a recurring villain with a specific reason to hate/dislike/oppose the adventurers—Darth Vader in **Star Wars**, Moriarty in the **Sherlock Holmes Stories**, Obadiah Hakeswill in the **Sharpe Books**—characters who turn up at inconvenient moments to cause trouble for our heroes. They need not be supervillains, like Vader, or criminal masterminds like Moriarty; Obadiah, for instance, is barely functional in society and obviously crazy as a loon. The one enduring quality of a proper nemesis, however, is indestructibility. You can thwart their plans, destroy their criminal enterprises, confound their politics, and frustrate their knavish tricks, but you can never (well, hardly ever) completely destroy them. A nemesis gives adventuring groups something to struggle against, something to focus their anger on, and gives it a name and a face.

Everyone has rivals. Well-developed character backgrounds will help the GM decide what kind of implacable foe to create for a given group. Mercenary groups can have rival units, merchants can have commercial rivals, and so on. Almost any group, however, can run afoul of a politician, a criminal cartel, or a madman.

Continual failure to destroy the nemesis, however, can prove frustrating to the players, however, so the GM needs to arrange for occasional victories. The destruction of the nemesis should only be accomplished after a grueling and extended campaign, to be sure, but eventually anyone will make a fatal mistake. And the players will value more highly what they achieve with great effort.

One of the more interesting fantasy campaigns I ever played involved a group who

discovered a hideous plot to take over the world—by a group of extradimensional insects posing as humans (they wore rubber disguises and long flowing robes, since they had little command of disguise magick). Our group uncovered the plot, and then spent several game years fleeing from their wrath, trying to gather proof and rally the world against the threat. Sadly, the campaign ended before we could complete our efforts, but it was tremendously fun while it lasted, and I remember the game with fondness.

Properly handled, a nemesis can give many hours of exciting, fun-filled gaming.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* At least from my point of view—I suspect other people have different opinions.
** I had a different interpretation of the ending—when asked what I thought it meant, I said: "It means there's going to be a sequel."

Oct 29, 2001, What Makes a Good GM?

Someone sent **SJ Games** a product suggestion recently: a book on how to be a Game Master. I have a few opinions, but I am certainly not the one to expound on the subject—I am a terrible GM (I think have mentioned this before). However, I have encountered a few good ones over the years. Based on my meager experience:

I*mprovisation*: A good GM should be able to improvise. Most scenarios never go according to plan (players have a distressing tendency not to follow the prepared path), so a good GM must be able to adapt the course of the adventure, as it is unfolding, and still keep things interesting for the players. This is difficult, and even tougher to achieve consistently. I found that no matter how well I planned for every foreseeable contingency, the players always managed to come up with an unforeseeable one. An ability to think fast and create situations off the cuff is required of a good GM.

Imagination: Good GMs need it—either their own or someone else's. Certain situations pop up over and over,* and it takes imagination to give them a slightly different spin. GMs can tap other people's imaginations via gaming publications, novels, movies, Internet chat groups, mailing lists, and discussion with other GMs. Use ideas from many different sources, mixed with your own.

Humor: A sense of humor is important to a GM (if only to enable him to put up with the players). This doesn't mean I think every game should be an exercise in slapstick or a contest to see who can come up with the worst bilingual pun,** but an occasional in-joke to lighten the tension is never out of place. In one of my campaigns, I tossed in a casual reference to the fact that the prime export of the **Twylo** system was walnuts (a reference to **It May Look Like a Walnut**, the only "science fiction" episode on the old **Dick van Dyke Show** that I know of).

Misdirection: Like a good magic trick, a good adventure involves misdirection. Side plots and red herrings to temporarily distract the players add to the richness and enjoyment of the gaming experience, provided they aren't overused.

Acting Talent: My youngest brother maintains that roleplaying is simply a form of improvisational theater (he also says that using miniatures makes it improvisational puppet theater). The ability to use different voices, mannerisms, accents, and gestures when portraying NPCs is very useful to a good GM. There are limits to the average person's abilities along these lines, of course, but everyone should make the effort, even if they aren't very good—an award-winning performance is not necessary to enrich the experience of your players.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are those who claim that only a finite number of plots exist, and I am sure that this applies to games as well as books.

** A mention of the lost book **Alice in Ordnung** by Lewis Carroll is my personal favorite, but the mercenary motto

Deus Ex Machinegun is a close second.

Nov 12, 2001, Time Travel

Since I first read **A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court**, I have liked time travel stories, although some of the twists and turns make my head hurt thinking about them (in many cases, this is the author's intention). The inherent attraction of the time-travel story to SF authors is too complicated to go into here, and discussion of the feasibility of time travel rapidly leads to talk of free will, predestination, and numerous other topics that have filled volumes. I plan to touch on the problems inherent in using time travel in RPGs.

Traveller is almost ideal for time-travel adventures. There is an enormous existing background and a vast game "history" with numerous critical intersections of events, and no small number of possible "alternative futures" to play with. **GDW** never dealt with time travel in **Traveller**. I think this was mainly because we felt there was enough to do in the game without adding complications.*

There are a couple of things that the GM needs to settle on before beginning. First, how exactly is the trip accomplished? How complicated is it? There are a wide range of choices: Hank Morgan (the **Connecticut Yankee**, above) made the trip after being cold-cocked in a fight. In Jack Finney's **Time and Again**, the hero makes the trip by self-hypnosis, convincing himself that he's in 1882. In **Millennium** and **12 Monkeys**, the trip requires a huge installation and dozens of technicians. Other books and films have just about everything in between, from handhelds to DeLoreans.

There are are numerous paradoxes inherent in time travel, which the stories all try to explore to a greater or lesser degree. GMs running **Time Travel Traveller** will need to deal with many of these as well. Normally, there is some kind of penalty for meeting oneself, usually fatal. Sometimes this means that one person cannot be two places in the same universe at the same time, sometimes it just means that your two "selves" cannot physically touch. There are numerous variations on the "grandfather" paradox** ("What happens if a time-traveler somehow prevents his own existence?"), lots of messing around with cause and effect, and some fundamental decisions to be made about the nature of time itself. **GURPS Time Travel** discusses how to handle the major paradoxes (and a lot of other things besides).

A major attraction of time-travel adventures is the chance to "set things right"—to prevent some cataclysmic event or series of events from taking place, or to set history on a better course (or at least one that seems better—I've dealt with this notion in an earlier article). GMs with a particularly nasty streak might consider the numerous ways Murphy's Law can be made to apply to time travel, and keep the team going back until they get it "right."

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* **GDW** considered several time-travel games, but we never got much beyond the

prototype stage—like most game companies, we had more game lines than we had the resources to support properly.

** One of my favorites along these lines was Fritz Leiber's "S**nakes vs. Spiders"** S**tories.** In one of them, the group has to go back in time and replace Queen Elizabeth I with a cloned doppleganger, drugged and hypnotized to make sure things take their proper course. In the midst of the story, the protagonist discovers that the Elizabeth they are replacing is not the original, but the other side's substitution. Further, this has happened uncountable times before, and the various "time teams" are constantly tripping over each other while sneaking around Elizabethan England. It soon becomes clear that nobody on either side has a clue what the "original" time stream was actually like.

Nov 26, 2001, No Problem

Many years ago, I read an article in a national gaming publication that dealt with the "realities" of science fiction. I have forgotten the exact title (and the author shall remain unnamed) but it might as well have been titled *I Have Seen the Future . . . and It Is DULL!* The author explained, in great detail, why everything that was cool and interesting about SF games (FTL drives, laser hand weapons, and antigravity, to name a few) was totally impossible, and that SF games were thus (in his opinion) total fantasy. The author had either never heard of the phrase suspension of disbelief or chose to ignore it.

When SF fans talk about "suspension of disbelief," they mean that it is necessary to take some items of a given story on faith—certain stories require one or more of the known laws of physics to be bent or ignored completely. For example, interstellar civilizations usually require faster-than-light (FTL) travel.* Since this is (with our present understanding) impossible on any practical level, any story or game involving FTL requires the readers/players to willingly ignore the impossibility.

From a game-design standpoint (I have some small familiarity with this subject), there is much to gain from ignoring a problem entirely. Take **Space: 1889**, for example.

One of the features of the **Space: 1889** background was "liftwood," a naturally occurring shrub on Mars with anti-gravity properties (which required a suspension of disbelief all its own). Liftwood was used to create aerial flyers that floated like lighter-than-air craft. Some were propelled by steam engines, but others (primarily those of the Martians, which were known as "kites" to us Earthmen) used sails. The vessels could tack and generally act just like maritime vessels, which is quite impossible. Ships on water can tack because they have keels and are at the interface between the water and the air (I invite those interested in the details to look it up, it is fascinating). Everyone involved with the design of the game knew two things: 1) Kites could not possibly tack or do anything other than sail directly downwind, and 2) this would have made for a pretty dull game—having flyers act like sailing ships is simply too cool a concept to be allowed to founder on the rocks of reality. There are those who feel we should have invented some reasonable-sounding-but-essentially-nonsensical explanation for why kites could tack. We didn't—we chose instead to simply ignore the whole thing. The game universe has a reason why kites work as described. Sufficiently knowledgeable characters know perfectly well what this reason is, even if their controlling players do not. It does mean that some players are not able to use their characters to manipulate the game universe as much as they would like, but I consider this a minor problem.

Bringing things back to **Traveller**, there are hundreds of things that a starfaring civilization must have solved, but that the game doesn't cover in detail. People wear vacc suits for hours on end, and there must be provision for the comfortable and sanitary disposal of bodily wastes—but we in the 21st century** haven't worked that out completely. Spacecraft

must be able to recycle water and other consumables to a degree present-day engineers can only dream of. There are questions of overheating in spacecraft and deep-space installations that cause no end of discussion among gearheads. All of these things are problems for which solutions have to have been found—I just can't tell you what they are because I have a history degree from ISU, not an engineering degree from CalTech.

As I remarked some years ago when someone at a convention was pestering me for details on how jump drive worked: "If I could draw a circuit diagram for the [expletive deleted] thing, I'd have patented it by now!" There are some questions for which there are no proper answers (at least for now). There is a point at which players just have to accept the fact that their characters know things they do not. Of course, where to draw that line is a matter for discussion. Some people revel in working out explanations for the inexplicable, but I'm not one of them (perhaps this is one of the reasons I'm not very good as a GM). In any case, I don't feel that my inability to explain jump drives to four decimal places is a problem.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

*Although not always—L. Sprague de Camp's **Krishna Books** (identifiable by the use of a word beginning with "Z" in the title) are set in a universe where FrL does not exist.

**You have no idea how strange it is for me to say that. I still have trouble wrapping my mind around the concept that the 21st century is now "the present."

Dec 10, 2001, Is THAT All?

Inventor and entrepreneur Dean Kamen revealed his latest invention to the world a couple of days ago.* The Segway scooter (do your own web search, the practice will be good for you), which has been the subject of months of speculation and carefully leaked rumors, has arrived, and it has largely been greeted with yawns (although it has provided late-night television comedians with several monologues so far). The promotion for the scooter said it would revolutionize city life, and speculation on tech-oriented websites had it incorporating everything from fusion power to teleportation.

Now we finally get to see it, and it looks like a cross between a scooter and a old-fashioned rotary lawn mower (to paraphrase the **Associated Press**).

As evidence of how boring techno-geeks find this device, I have yet (see previous footnote) to receive a single e-mail asking why we didn't foresee this revolutionary device in **Traveller** and when will we reprint the game to incorporate it. Not a single conversion to game stats has arrived. Pundits the world over are already heaping satire upon the poor device, and I'm wondering: Why? What is it about we humans that make us want to laugh at the Segway scooter? Similar devices were staples of science fiction well into the '50s (the '70s if you count **The Jetsons**). "Slidewalks" and "flying cars" are no less silly. Practically every popular science and mechanical magazine used to run articles on similar machines about once a year. And hundreds of patents are issued each year for devices that are far more laughable (**Pocket Fisherman**, anyone?).

Granted, the scooter doesn't live up to its hype—I doubt this will cause us to totally rebuild our cities any time soon, and it certainly is not going to replace the car or the bicycle. I suspect this is the biggest crime Mr. Kamen and his backers committed: they got us all worked up with excitement and anticipation. Nothing this side of antigravity paint** could have lived up to the massive promotional campaign the **Segway** has received. Some people are very irritated to have their expectations whipped up to a fever pitch this way, and then

. . . a pogo stick with wheels?

Is that all? A very sophisticated (and very expensive) motorized scooter? A $3,000 toy for gadget collectors and lazy rich people? Actually, if you ignore the advanced promotion and pie-in-the-sky promises, Mr. Kamen's scooter may very well have uses: the US Postal Service is looking at them for mail carriers, and I can see how they might prove useful in some industrial and office situations. Their maneuverability will probably make them popular with the elderly as wheelchair replacements . . . my mother could have used one in the last few years of her life (as I get older and more decrepit, I might find use for one myself). It could replace golf carts if they put a rack on the front to hold the bag of clubs.

But we'll see how much it changes our lives beyond that.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Bear in mind that I'm writing this more than 10 days before it appears.

** Anybody remember a juvenile series about a boy inventor/scientist/detective named Danny Dunn? I remember several, but Danny Dunn and the **Anti-Gravity Paint** is relevant here.

Dec 24, 2001, Christmas Collection

Thanks to the miracle of automation, this edition of **From the Management** will be appearing on Christmas Day* (provided we set everything up well enough in advance and some disaster doesn't befall the assorted machines that will be doing the work). Ordinarily, the date of the article would dictate that I write something about holidays in **Traveller,** but having already done two editorials on Holidays of the Third Imperium (1 and 2), I've pretty much exhausted what can reasonably be said on that topic. So this will just be a collection of unconnected things that I think **Traveller** fans might find interesting:

The nice folks at the **OED (the Oxford English Dictionary)** are looking for citations for certain science-fiction terms. They're trying to track down the first occurrence of things like "humanoid" and "alien" in an SF context, and how the usage has changed over the years . . . but all that is explained on their website. All in all, a worthwhile pursuit, and well worth checking out even if you can't contribute.

The search engine **Google** has recently added the 20-year **Usenet Archives** to their collection, so it is now possible to review stuff people said as far back as 1981. I did a couple of quick searches: a search for **GDW** yielded 45,000+ hits. I could very easily waste days (if I were so inclined) in reviewing old discussions, flamewars, debates, rumors, and the like. Everything I ever said on a Usenet group is still floating around out there. Not only that, but several people have taken to quoting me in their sig blocks, so my name ends up on groups that I never participated in and never heard of.

Reviewing some of the **Traveller** threads reminded me of a general principle: every major decision I make concerning games makes me one enemy. When I took the job here with **SJ Games**, I deeply offended one fan (evidently the fact that I was going to create **GURPS Traveller** would cause the destruction of western civilization). There is no point in going into other specific examples, but I think that **Traveller** inspires such passionate devotion in some fans that their entire lives revolve around the game. They expect me to have an identical devotion to the game, and transfer to me their own views and feelings about various features of the game world. When I do not share their views, they feel betrayed.

Along these lines, I used to wonder how anyone could not like me. I was such a wonderful person, how could anyone possibly be irritated at anything I did or said? Then, when

I was about 25, it slowly began to dawn on me that, in a lot of ways, I was a jerk. I was a pompous know-it-all, I always ruined the punchline of other people's jokes, and I tended to blurt out the endings to stories when someone else was telling them. I had a lot of the characteristics I couldn't stand in other people, and the realization of that came as a great shock to me. I am still fighting retrograde actions against some of these character flaws.

To end on a (miniatures-related) high note, I recently decided to try my hand at painting one of those 200mm-scale busts as a Christmas present for a friend, and am having a great time with it. I'll be posting the details (as well as some step-by-step pictures) on my website in early January.

I hope you are all enjoying the happiest possible Winter Solstice Celebration (TM) of your choice, and engaging in whatever mass-consumption activities are permitted/required by your government/religion/society/family or peer group. Remember: every food item not specifically forbidden is compulsory (except fruitcake, which is probably a violation of the **Geneva Protocols)**.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* With any luck, I will be spending the holiday acting as host for a visit from my sister and one of my nieces, and engaged in nearly constant telephone/e-mail conversations with my other relatives and friends.

2002

2002

Jan 07, 2002, Looking Back 1

This issue's topic derives from a casual comment I made on the discussion boards, which sparked the suggestion that I work it up into a full fledged **From the Management.** Although I touched on this theme briefly in a previous essay (called **Hindsight**),I didn't go into any great detail. In the discussion, I mentioned in passing how I had a few things I would do differently if I could "reset" **Traveller** and start the design over from scratch (in 1977), with the benefit of 25 years of hindsight. These are my own speculations, and do not even purport to represent any thoughts that Marc Miller or Frank Chadwick might have in the matter.

Ground Rules:

I will preserve Marc's original vision, as I see it.

I will restrict myself to the RPG, and not get into other products like board games, movies, or outside licenses. Most of these ideas are not well-thought-out proposals, merely notions.I am not going to go very deeply into why these things weren't done, or specifics on how I would have implemented them.

Rules

As far as rule mechanics go, the main thing I would like to have done would be to get away from doing everything in even groups of six. Specifically, I would have more than six careers (which we eventually went with, anyway). It would have been nice to have more diversity in the range of careers presented, and get away from the almost purely military nature of the initial careers. I would make character generation a little less random, and give the players more choice in the skills they receive. This is a sore point with many people— and I see the arguments on both sides, but I prefer to come down on the side of giving people more control over their final characters than the original **Classic Traveller** rules did.*

I can't think of much else I'd want to do to the rules, given the time and the place. **Classic Traveller** was pretty advanced when it came out.

Setting

The big changes I would make are to the background and the setting. I am torn between two notions, the first being to create several different "official" background milieux, and the second to try to make the "Imperium" background more flexible. The main thing I'd like to have done is to plan the backgrounds a little better—too many aspects of the official universe "just grew," more or less unsupervised, and some are still coming back to haunt me 20+ years later. However, I'd stick with Marc's basics: jump takes about 1 week and comes in quanta of 1-6 parsecs, no communication faster than the speed of travel, and so on.

The first notion has many advantages: people could have the "expanding frontier" setting, the "merchant prince" setting, the "huge/tiny/oppressive/weak/whatever Imperium" setting. The main disadvantage of multiple milieux would have been the tremendous amount of staff time required to administer a background. **GDW**'s staff in 1977 was small, and we might not have been able to pull it off.

As for the second notion, I would have liked to shuffle the Imperium's neighbors around a bit, to make room for a fairly large "unexplored" area where frontier-type adventuring could take place. There would need to be some reason why this area has recently

opened up—perhaps a recent advance in jump technology that makes a previously impassable void traversable, allowing access to a new section of interstellar space.

For all the various backgrounds, I'd stick with a reasonably consistent history—I'd still have the Ancients, and I'd keep the main alien races we developed over the years (I was deeply involved in the creation of most of them, and I am attached to them).

I'm not sure what I would do about various technical questions regarding stellar densities and the like. Much more is now known about the relative proportions of various types of stars (enthusiasts will excuse me for not using the proper terms—this is not an area where I have much expertise), but this is the sort of thing that changes every time a new paper is published, and if we were to have published sector mapping and world-design sequences in 1977 based on 2002 knowledge, we would have been laughed at and derided for departing from "reality." Along the same lines, I'm pretty sure I'd stick with a 2-D mapping system. In 1977, there was no practical way of doing it for something the size of the Imperium without a computer, and given the state (and availability) of computers in those days, two-dimensional mapping (for jump routes anyway) was the only viable option if the game was to achieve any large-scale sales. Ship-to-ship combat is a different matter . . . maybe something could have been worked out. I would have left that up to those with more talent at system design (I'm sure Marc and Frank could have come up with something good, given enough time).

Would this have made the game better? I can't say with any certainty—the problem with "rewinding the tape" is that there's no guarantee you won't mess things up even worse the second (or third, or fourth) time around. Would it have made the game sell any better? Again, I don't know. It would be nice to have achieved the level of popular fame where we could have had a movie or TV series. But **Traveller** has a lot going for it as it stands—how many games last 25 years, after all?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I prefer playing certain types of characters, and not others. I guess this means that I am not a "pure" roleplayer, by some peoples' definition—but it is not something I'm going to lose sleep over.

Jan 21, 2002, Looking Back 2

This springs from the same discussion as the previous editorial, but the basic question today is: "What would be done differently if **Traveller** were launched today?"

Ground rules are the same as before (mostly)—keep Marc's original vision, etc. Some of these collide with reality, however (more on this below). I will skip merrily over the question of how I come to know what I know now if **Traveller** had not been released in 1977. I will not touch at all on certain questions, such as the need for various non-game support, like an accounting staff, sales and marketing, advertising and promotion, and all that wonderful

business-related stuff that eats up the time of almost everyone in the game business. Nor will I cover art, graphics, and layout—rolling out a major RPG requires a good art director, graphic designer, graphic artists, and other production staff. In addition, you need artists to create the covers and interior illustrations needed for a good, marketable product (I cover this in a previous essay). I will not deal with non-game support, such as novels, related computer games, posable action figures, t-shirts, and the like, and I will not go near the question of rules mechanics—there is enough for fans to argue about as it is without

starting on "What rules system is best?".

*Web Presence/Computer Suppor*t: A website* supporting the game line is a must these days (creating a website when **Traveller** first came out would have presented certain problems). I won't discuss the details, as these are fairly obvious—a mailing list for new releases and other news on the game, a web store for direct sales, a discussion board for fans, another one (password protected) for designers, and a FAQ for common questions.

Additional good things to have: a CD-ROM version of the rules (properly indexed) with a boatload of printable forms and other goodies, GM-assistance software (ideally for multiple platforms), mapping utilities (see below), and so on.

Web Presence/Computer Support—Collision with Reality: To do this properly, we'd need someone to maintain the whole shebang, a reliable ISP, and all that stuff I'm sure you are familiar with. Some of this can be handled by volunteer labor, but some of it requires the aforementioned supporting organization.

3D Mapping: The biggest change I'd make would be to introduce 3D mapping as an option, and revise the maps of the Imperium to take into account the current standards on stellar types and the relative proportions thereof.

I'd probably do this as one of several alternate milieux (see below).

3D Mapping—Collision with Reality: While computers allow 3D mapping, there is still the problem that not everyone owns a computer, and those who do have trouble agreeing on certain basic standards—like how to display the 3D map. Additionally, the state of knowledge about the universe is constantly changing and the instant we put something on paper, a new discovery about red dwarfs or green giants** will render it obsolete.

Alternatives: Rather than stick with one "official" background, I'd support several, and I haven't completely settled what these would be. I would have several sizes of Imperium, possibly the same entity at several stages in its development. I'd have a background suitable for frontier adventures and one designed to produce mercenary campaigns. I'd want a "**Rebels Against an Evil Empire**" background and a "**Merchant Prince**" background. One or more of these could be used for high-level diplomatic and military campaigns.

Alternatives—Collision with Reality: Supporting even one background can be very time-consuming; keeping several of them straight would require a full-time "hand at the helm." For this reason, I think it would be handy to overlap as many of the backgrounds' histories as possible.

Literary wellsprings: **Traveller** took its inspirations from the kind of SF that Marc and the rest of us read, which concentrated on certain types. As part of keeping Marc's original vision, I'd stick with those literary inspirations, incorporating new ideas only where they did not conflict with the earlier ones. The literary base is broad, and could include much of what is current in SF, but not everything (see the tech discussion, below).

Literary wellsprings—Collision with Reality: This means **Traveller** would not draw upon certain genres of SF currently in vogue, and we might lose some potential fans that way. Perhaps one of the alternate backgrounds could include different types of "supertech," but then the game starts straying from the original vision.

Technology: I'd incorporate any technology (or proposed technology, or pie-in-the-sky technology) into **Traveller** that wouldn't interfere with the expression of Marc's original vision. This means that much of the post-singularity/nanotech/artificial intelligence/super-hyper-computer tech that permeates so much present-day SF literature will appear in a very watered-down form, if at all. This topic is discussed in the sidebars to pp. GT14-19, and I won't repeat my thoughts here.

All of this assumes that Traveller is electrifying enough to attract the same type of fan it did in 1977 . . . which is a rather large assumption, but not relevant to this discussion.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of my official assignments at **GDW** was to look into setting up a **GDW** website. This would have been done about 1994 or so, but other things intervened. Would this have helped keep **GDW** in business? I don't know. It would certainly have given us a place to counter the web rumors (which were a factor in **GDW**'s demise) in a more timely fashion, but I don't know if that would have been enough, in and of itself. It is all water under the bridge now, of course, but both of these editorials (this one and last week's are exactly the same sort of daydreaming.

** **Green Giant** is not a stellar type, it is my attempt at a pun for this issue. Isaac Asimov once wrote a story where a key point was that all jokes except puns were part of a psychological experiment conducted by aliens.

Feb 04, 2002, To Each His Own

The last couple of weeks have seen a massive increase in traffic on the discussion boards, most of it dealing with one or two topics. I won't go into the discussions themselves (interested parties should check them out) other than to say that they revolve around aspects of the **Traveller Universe** that fans are tremendously interested in.

Those of us who worked at **GDW** liked to get together, away from work, from time to time. We'd gather at a central location (often Frank's house) for dinner and conversation, bringing friends, significant others, and assorted "hangers on" (as we used to call them). Since we had learned to stay from religion and politics,* our gatherings focused on the same conversational topics: history (mostly military history) and science fiction.

This puzzled spouses and the like. After all, they reasoned, we spend our working days dealing with wargames and such. Why did we feel the need to talk about the same thing when away from the office? To an impartial observer, it might seem that we had no lives other than these topics (something we share with many **Traveller** fans). The problem, of course, was that we spent our days working and this often required us to focus on different aspects of the topic than we would during our non-working discussions. "Work" discussions dealt with the business of gaming, which is 90% similar to most other businesses—sales and marketing, advertising, getting product in from suppliers and out the door to the ultimate consumer. The game-related discussions we had were primarily forced upon us by the publication schedule—we had to talk about them, so there was no enjoyment in them for us.

The discussions we had for fun had no such restrictions. We could talk about Gettysburg even if we weren't doing a game about it. We could discuss the generalship of Patton and compare it to Zhukov's, what exactly Heinlein was trying to say in **The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress**, and the difference that iron ramrods made to 18th Century warfare. In other words, we could talk about what we wanted to talk about, not what the demands of the job required us to talk about.

I sense some of the same enthusiasms (albeit not the same topics) on the **JTAS** discussion boards, and it makes me wonder, occasionally, what some of you do for a living. I know in a few cases, but obviously not all.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* We agreed to disagree on these subjects. Some people enjoy discussing them with

friends, but we discovered that we could not do so without arousing great anger in all concerned.

Feb 18, 2002, Attractions

The response to my question in the last line of my previous editorial was enormous. I asked, "What do you do for a living?" (actually, what I said was ". . . it makes me wonder, occasionally, what some of you do for a living," but it was interpreted as a question). Rather surprisingly, not everyone was an IT professional or an engineer of some kind, which is what non-**Traveller** gamers always seem to think. **Traveller** got labeled early on as the game for technogeeks, and my theory on the reason for this is that, for years, this game was what the phrase "SF-RPG" meant to the gaming public.

Years ago, George Takei was to be a guest of honor at **GenCon**, and we (**GDW**) were offered the chance to present him with a special copy of the game as part of one of his seminars.* Dave Nilsen delivered the presentation speech I wrote, which said, in effect: **Traveller** was not the first SF RPG. **Star Trek** was not the first SF TV series. But just as **Star Trek** became the standard against which all subsequent series were judged, **Traveller** became the standard for games. I offer as evidence the fact that for many years after the game was first published, it seemed to be impossible to review another SF RPG without comparing it to (or at least mentioning) **Traveller**.

Science fiction has always attracted scientific and engineering types in large numbers (amateur and professional), and **Traveller** was no exception to this general rule. **Traveller** enabled people to create their own spaceships, and additions to the line enabled them to do it in greater and greater detail, and expanded the coverage to other vehicles, culminating in the two versions of **Fire, Fusion, and Steel** (the first by **GDW,** the second by **Imperium Games**). This feature drew techies to **Traveller** in great numbers. The game satisfied the creative urges of its fans so well that it was possible to play **Traveller** solo simply by designing various things—indeed, many fans did nothing but create sector after sector, populating them with worlds, aliens, starports, and civilizations (some of us were lucky enough to get paid for it), seldom actually sitting down for a face-to-face game.

And I know it's not just me. In the late 1980s, at a large game convention (I forget which), I was hanging around the hotel bar without my convention name tag** when I overheard a conversation between two gamers discussing their favorite games. One announced that **Traveller** was a game for number-crunchers, and was taken aback when his companion responded, "You say that like it's a bad thing."

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* We created a **Traveller** "Sulu" character for him—several, actually, representing various stages in his career—and handed it to him along with a special set of game books. He received them with the good grace expected of GoHs under such conditions.

** I have a friend who often attends conventions for coin dealers who calls the name tags "*Please Rob Me*" Badges because they mark you as a stranger in town. I've never noticed this to be a problem at game conventions, but I usually remove my badge when not actually on the convention floor. Some people recognize me anyway.

Mar 04, 2002, Spam*

In keeping with our need to label person, place, thing, and concept at least three different times, junk e-mail is now called unsolicited commercial e-mail. There are numerous groups devoted to reducing spam—*http://spam.abuse.net/* will lead you to others, and you can probably learn more than you want to know.

Just out of curiosity, I looked at a random spam I had received at *lkw@io.com*. It was a simple come-on plugging some kind of "*fountain of youth*" snake-oil, and gave a link to an online storefront (names deleted). The message included a lengthy note outlining how the e-mail was not spam, but was being sent to me because I had joined a mailing list, and reassured me that if I wanted to be removed from the list, I could do so quickly and easily by following the directions included at the end of the e-mail.

Being somewhat hip, in my own stumbling way, to the ways of the Internet, I decided to look into the spam and see what I could discover. A few minutes examining the headers of the e-mail showed that the sender had used a free e-mail account from a popular nationwide provider (name changed to protect the innocent), and had not bothered to try to conceal the source—presumably intending to abandon the free e-mail address when the spam was sent. Of course, I had not signed up for any mailing list dealing with snake-oil. A little work on WhoIs revealed that the website where the "remove" message was to be sent did not exist (no surprise there). The online store was registered to "R.B." with an address in Irvine, California. On a hunch, I searched **Google** for that address, and it turned up dozens of matches for the particular suite that was listed. Following a further hunch, I searched for just the street number, and found that it was the location of a private mailing service—a mail drop. Searching for the other businesses revealed several more websites, all registered to different names at the same mailing address. These businesses offered (or purported to offer) a variety of goods and services (herbal dietary supplements, baldness cures, drugs from overseas "discount" sources, self-help tapes, etc.), but the one I found most interesting offered "e-business" set-up packages . . . complete with software to harvest e-mail addresses from the **World Wide Web**. The spammer, among other things, is selling software to other (potential) spammers.

The anti-spam websites are filled with stories of people who are fighting spam. Several have managed to file lawsuits, and one fellow boasts of having gotten civil judgments against several people (and has collected on one or two of them). All of this is entertaining reading, but I have neither the talent nor the inclination to become a spam-cop—and I don't want to.

Dealing with the stuff is becoming an increasing nuisance. Beginning a few months ago, whenever I signed on to my **AOL** account (*gdwgames@aol.com***), I would be plastered with instant messages*** from people with handles like Pix4U33948 and Sexysally023 (I never opened any of them, but I can deduce their contents). For a time, I simply bounced them, one at a time, but when they started to arrive every few minutes, it became difficult to get anything else done while signed on to **AOL** but delete them. I am a little hazy at what is going on, but evidently non-subscribers have recently gained the ability to "message" AOL subscribers. **AOL** allows subscribers to automatically block all incoming instant messages, but I didn't want to do that because of the five or so people I genuinely want to communicate with in this way. I ended up blocking all but a select few, which I must list individually. I cannot simply block Sexysally023 because the next note will be from Sexysally024.

When I complain about spam, some people have asked "What's the problem? Just delete it unread . . . you can do that with a single click." Sadly, for me, that isn't true. I often receive e-mail from fans or long-lost friends, so I can't simply delete mail from any address I don't recognize. Spammers sometimes disguise their messages, so they are not always immediately distinguishable from conventional e-mail. But the main problem with spam

is the sheer volume.

Spam costs the sender next to nothing. A traditional direct-mail advertising piece can cost the mailer a dollar or more (postage, printing, and so on), but the cost of spam is usually borne by someone besides the mailer. Since it costs nothing, the people who used to take out free ads in the shopping papers have moved into spam.

Spam is a consequence of the computer revolution that almost nobody predicted. All of the "corporate dystopias" that I am familiar with missed this one, although a few predicted that advertising (a.k.a. "product placement") would spread everywhere (one author casually mentioned advertising projected into the retinas of train passengers). For every advance in technology that filters out advertising, there soon follows another advance to counteract it.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The nice folks at **Hormel Foods** have announced that they prefer people to use the word "spam" as a euphemism for unwanted e-mail, and "SPAM" (all caps) when referring to their canned luncheon meat.

** I retain the **GDW** account for old-time's sake.

*** Instant messages are a recent discovery—a way to chat to (or pester, annoy, and bother) people on a real-time basis, without the time and inconvenience of e-mailing them. Evidently this is for people who find instant coffee too slow.

Mar 18, 2002, How Did We Ever Get Anything Done?

In a previous essay, I touched briefly on what it is like to be deprived of the benefits of modern civilization, even if only for a few hours. As I write this, I have been deprived of a home computer for almost a week (although it is now reformatted and I am reinstalling software), and I began suffering withdrawal pains almost instantly.

Every research paper, every essay, and every term paper I ever wrote while in school was written on a typewriter. Until I entered college, all I had was a manual (muscle-powered) typewriter. I did the first draft in longhand on legal pads, made revisions as needed, and typed it out by hand. Error correction meant painting over the error with "white goop" and typing over it again (if you were lucky enough to still be typing on the same line, this worked out reasonably well—if not, there could be problems). Cut and paste was literally that—you cut your document up and pasted it together again. Spell checking involved making use of a clever thing called a spelling dictionary: a dictionary without definitions (which meant that it was smaller and easier to use) that also showed syllable divisions for hyphenating. Footnotes and such like were a major pain—I'll be happy to describe the process for those interested. Indexing was nightmarish, and reserved for major works like theses or dissertations. Worst of all, the machine had no memory, so if you wanted a copy you used carbon paper (again, description available on request) as you typed or made use of a photocopier somewhere if you wanted a "backup."* The earliest games at **GDW** were written in this same fashion.

My first experience with "modern" word processors was when **GDW** bought an **IBM Selectric Electronic Compositor** with mag cards. The mag cards were strips of stiff magnetic material, about 3" by 7", upon which documents could be recorded. You could type in a whole book once, and record it on a thick bundle of cards—each card held about 2.5 digest-sized pages. You could call up the document at any time (by stuffing a huge deck of mag cards into a slot on top of the system's memory unit) make changes, and save it. You

could print it out (with glacial slowness compared to modern machines), and you could make as many copies as required—including backups of the cards if you wanted. I remember wishing at the time that I could have had access to such a machine five years earlier . . .

Later, **GDW** bought a full dress **MCS** typesetter (and sold the **Selectric Compositor** to **FASA**—I think), but by that time, each designer had their own personal computer with word processing software. We had even networked the computers to the typesetter, after a fashion—we hooked the typesetter (which thought it was talking to a modem) to an **Apple II** (which thought it was talking to a printer) and imported files using "Sneakernet" (an early version of the Internet, involving floppy disks and a lot of walking).

Anyway, the lack of a usable computer at home means that any writing I do either has to be at the office (not available if I happen to have an inspiration just before going to bed or at other odd times) or in longhand (since I no longer have a typewriter). Sitting at home with a canary-yellow legal pad on my lap, I marvel that I ever got anything written that way. It seems so slow, so sluggish . . . and writers' cramp seems to set in much faster than it used to. What's worse, my ability to spell has deteriorated from over-dependence on automatic spell checking (though I have disabled the automatic grammar checker—it's more trouble than it's worth).

Computers have not only changed how games are written—they have also changed how they are played. Programs such as **Campaign Cartographer** enable anyone to create maps better than those created by professional publishers in the early days. Spreadsheets and purpose-written programs such as **GURPS Character Builder** have made creating characters, vehicles, starships and equipment faster and easier than ever before.

Games can still be written longhand, and maps can still be created with pen, brush, and ink. If you're a savant of some kind, you can even design starships without an electronic calculator. But it all seems so . . . primitive. How did we ever get anything done? The answer of course, is that the machine is not necessary to the process. It just eliminates certain of the dreary physical tasks—the dreary mental tasks remain. In all probability, 20 years from now, we will all wonder how we ever managed to exist without [fill in the blank].

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Rumors of students who had years of work destroyed were rampant in graduate school. Students would keep current (and indeed, all previous) versions of a thesis or major research paper in their refrigerator, because it was rumored that the appliance's contents could survive an apartment fire—although I never knew anyone who had proved that by personal experience. Furniture, clothing, even books could be replaced, but your research notes and drafts were irreplaceable. The lucky ones had a friendly faculty member with a fireproof filing cabinet who would agree to shelter the documents.

Apr 01, 2002, Alternate Histories

One of last year's polls revealed a substantial crossover in interest between **Traveller** fans and history buffs. Another strong correlation I've noticed over the years is the enormous overlap between history buffs and alternate histories. I've been an alternate-history fan almost as long as I've been a history fan; I think it is endemic with historians, as if our brains were all hard-wired the same way. It is especially true of military historians (of which group I count myself a member) in general and wargamers in particular (what is wargaming, if not the exploration of alternate battle results?). Alternate histories have formed the basis of a number of books and movies,* and no small number of serious historical books

have been devoted to alternate histories, which have acquired the label "Counterfactual Histories" and a veneer of respectability. For those interested in pursuing the subject further, I suggest a recent collection of essays entitled What If?.**

Speculations of this nature have to follow certain rules, established by tradition, which means that not everyone follows them. These are:

A single point of departure from reality is preferred. This comes from a tradition in fictional alternate histories, and is generally adhered to. The point of departure can be general or specific, at the discretion of the author, but any other changes must come about as a result of the single change. Everything that came before must remain the same.

Avoid the "*Roman Empire with Cars*" syndrome. If the empire of Alexander the Great doesn't collapse into petty, bickering states, it doesn't mean culture and society will be recognizable 2,500 years later, except for technology (which will be almost exactly the same). Good alternate-history SF avoids this pitfall, but some "counterfactual historians" do not.

Try to avoid being silly. Frank had a phrase he used to describe some alternate histories of WWII: "*What if Eleanor Roosevelt could fly*?" He reserved it for scenarios that were calculated to create cool miniatures games that had little basis in reality.*** Good alternate histories should explore the possibilities of something that could have happened, but didn't. It should avoid highly unlikely (if not flat-out impossible) events. I'll admit my definition of "silly" may differ from yours.

A good alternate history should, in my opinion, be interesting, fun to read, and thought-provoking. I like the more intellectual ones that don't fill in history up to the present, except to outline how their change might interact with other major events. Would a "Rejuvenated Roman Empire" have dealt with the rise of Islam? If Alexander the Great had survived into his 60s and conquered India, how would his descendants have dealt with the Mongols?

The larger question here is to what extent technological development tied to other factors? How does the overall nature of society encourage (or inhibit) innovation? Would the explosion of technological development that occurred in Europe from 1750 to 1950 have taken place under a rejuvenated Roman/Persian/Hellenistic/Islamic/Mongol Empire? Could the industrial revolution take place? There are, of course, no simple answers, but I find this (and other) speculations immensely entertaining.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* It even penetrates to advertising. I once saw an advertisement in an archery magazine which showed a silhouette of a mounted Plains Indian in full regalia, holding aloft a modern hunting bow, complete with pulleys, cables, and all the other high-tech gizmos that go into a compound bow, over the headline "What If?". I thought this was especially silly—what if they'd had Uzis? Vulcan 20mm ADAs? Death Rays? Bulldozers? This violates the third principle of good "What if?"—Avoid Being Silly. This was, of course, not a serious alternate history, it was an advertisement . . .

** Actually, the full title is What If?—The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been, which is (presumably) to distinguish it from the myriad other What If? books that had been written, of which the earliest I know was What If: History Re-Written, which was first printed in the 1930s and included an essay by some guy named Winston Churchill entitled "**What If Lee had Lost the Battle of Gettysburg**?". Go to the What If? link on **Amazon**. and you will be presented with many similar options under the "People who bought this title also bought:" heading. which will include some serious contrafactuals and some fiction collections.

*** Into which category fall scenarios such as "What if Hitler transferred two armored divisions from the Russian Front to North Africa?" Frank used to get riled at such things. because they ignored the logistical realities of the period just to create a tabletop battle scenario where Rommel had more tanks.

Apr 15, 2002, Seed Packets

This essay will appear the day after the most dreaded day on the US calendar—April 15th. The horror of this day pales to insignificance next to August 27th 2003, however, when Mars will make its closest approach to the Earth in thousands of years and our fragile blue planet will be ripe for invasion by the little green guys.* So, to take your minds off of the impending catastrophe, **JTAS** presents:

Seed Packets

I was recently reading over a short essay by Carl Sagan, and in it he remarked that he was disappointed at the lack of imagination represented by crop circles—aliens travel billions and billions of miles and they can't think of anything better to do than draw designs in the hay.**

As I have remarked before in several places, I am not the world's best gamemaster. I am, in fact, pretty bad at it, but this has not (and will not) stop me from offering helpful hints to those more skilled than I am. I have always held that imagination is one of the things a good GM needs to run entertaining adventure sessions and campaigns. It need not be the GM's imagination, however—he can borrow it from others. Science fiction movies and books are an excellent source of adventure seeds, and looking for inspiration on the SF shelves at the local library/video rental store is pretty much a no-brainer. It doesn't hurt, however, to wander a little wider afield.

And you're not just looking for adventure ideas—**Traveller** GMs can always use ideas for interesting and unique personalities, odd new items to distract the group from the real adventure path, and unusual societies and customs. Beyond the SF genre, a GM can take ideas from horror, fantasy, action/adventure, and thrillers. Of course, you can cast an even wider net and go to history, cultural anthropology, and even **National Geographic** for inspiration. Even cartoons can be mined for "bits of business"—if you are running a mercenary campaign, you could do a lot worse than to consult Bill Maudlin's **Up Front** for adventure ideas, unique personalities, details of the military life, and soldiers' "in-jokes."

Naturally, the sort of source material you need depends on the sort of campaign you run. **Mercantile** "wheeling and dealing" campaigns will have little use for ideas from police procedural novels. **National Geographic** is a gold mine of cultures, peoples, societies, and history. Political thrillers can be mined for nefarious plots, crime novels for characters, even television commercials and magazine ads have their uses.

Another secret is to take a suggestion from a lot of creative writing courses, and observe people and things around you. This will seldom give you adventure seeds for a **Traveller** game (unless you hang out in a more exciting neighborhood than I live in), but it will often give you some useful tidbits for realistic NPCs.

Don't limit your imagination quest to just SF, or even just books and video. Just about anything can be used in a game, either in whole or in part.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This will be closer even than the **Angry Red Planet** came to us in August of 1924, and we all know what an unholy mess that was.

** Sagan, of course, did not believe they were extraterrestrial in origin—his remark about imagination was aimed at more earthly minds, who couldn't come up with anything better for ETs to do. I'll provide the exact reference for anyone who is really interested.

Apr 29, 2002, Old and New

Perhaps the biggest news is that, as of this issue, I will be handing over most of the editorial duties to Graeme Davis, who has been gradually assuming more and more of them over the last few weeks. This is all part of a larger plan to give me more time to write, and includes the promotion of Graeme to Editor of **JTAS** and Jon Zeigler to **Traveller Line Editor**. I become **Traveller Senior Line Editor,** and will take on more writing projects and less day-to-day administrative duties. Among other things, I'll still be writing the lion's share of **From the Management,** although I expect Jon and Graeme to kick in guest essays from time to time. I'll still review articles for faithfulness to the **Traveller** background(s), and I'll still write most of the **TNS** news items—mainly, however, I will be writing for GURPS Traveller (and some other projects at **SJ Games**). I'll probably get to actually write some articles for a change!. I think this arrangement will please everyone concerned, subscribers included. For details on this and other changes check out today's **Illuminator** and our discussion of the changes and what they will mean to you in Brubek's Wednesday night.

Anyway, on to other things:

Everything Old is New Again

We get new subscribers from time to time, and sometimes they write me after having plowed their way through the archives and want to comment on one of my editorial essays that especially impressed them. Often, when this happens, I'll go to the **JTAS** archives and reread the essay in question. I think I have mentioned before that I can't stand reading my own prose for a while after I finish it. After some time has passed, however, I sometimes like to go back and revisit what I've written. I'm not sure why this is. It may be the boost to my ego from seeing my words in print (or on the screen, in more recent times). It may be because I'm as interested in what I write as other people seem to be, which strikes me as a little egocentric.* I'm less thrilled with what I wrote many years ago than I am of my more recent efforts—I've improved over the years (or so I like to believe). I am hideously embarrassed by some of the stuff I wrote in high school, college, and even in the early days of **GDW**.

I feel a curious combination of discovery and *deja vu* as I reread my older works. If it has been more than a year or two since I wrote the item in question, I have mostly forgotten what I said, but I retain a memory of the gist of it and I get some of the thrill of a person reading it for the first time. I can't escape the feeling that this is a little weird of me, however.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Line Editor, **Traveller**

* Then again, why shouldn't I be interested in what I've written? My brother used to say the reason he talked to himself was to guarantee both an interesting speaker and an intelligent, well-informed audience.

May 13, 2002, You Say Tomato, I Say Tomatoe

For Loren-the-history-buff, one of the interesting parts of working for a game company (and this is as true of **SJ Games** as it was for **GDW**) is that checking the historical parts of various games comes with the territory. One of the manuscripts I was handed recently was **GURPS Age of Napoleon**. I get to double-check the general historical accuracy of the timelines and the historical discussions, and look over the military sections for nitpicky details—Steve insists that the historical parts of all products be as accurate as we can make them.

An additional part of my commission is to suggest interesting historical tidbits for box-quotes and sidebar discussions. The material covered includes (among other things) the American Revolution and several of the prominent personalities involved, as well as a short discussion of the diet of both Americans and Europeans during the period. One of the sidebar discussions I suggested involved the tomato (or tomatoe if you will)—although Native Americans had eaten them for centuries, the American colonists believed them to be poisonous, and this view persisted well into the 19th Century. This is not as crazy as it sounds initially; the tomato has many toxic relatives.

The tomato (Lycopersicon esculentum) is part of the nightshade family (Solanaceae), which includes the belladonna group (Atropa var., aka deadly nightshade), as well as petunias, potatoes, eggplant, sweet peppers, chili peppers, and tobacco. Many members of the nightshade family are toxic to a greater or lesser degree,* and some of the ones that are commonly eaten have restrictions—the leaves and stems of potato and tomato plants, for example, contain traces of assorted potentially deadly compounds. Shortly after the tomato plant was discovered (it is native to the Andes mountains), it was introduced to both Europe and North America as an ornamental plant, and eventually came to be used in assorted cuisines (evidently the Italians started eating them in the 1550s). In the English colonies of North America, however, the tomato (sometimes called the "Love Apple" or *pomme d'amour*) was unknown to colonists and Native Americans alike. It was grown, but it remained an exotic foreign plant and was used for ornamental purposes only. It began to be used as food in the United States only after Thomas Jefferson** began growing (and eating) it in 1781. Many people in America refused to eat tomatoes well into the 20th century (my father, however, loved few things better than a couple of tomatoes fresh from the garden, and grew them by the bushel). I've always found this an amusing tidbit, and something interesting to tell people while we scarf down a pizza.

What's the connection with **Traveller**? Well, it all ties in with something I've talked about before and which I think is best expressed as "You can't make up stuff this good!". Very little has been established about food and drink in the **Traveller** universe, and what has been established has been introduced as bits of "color" in an adventure: groats, Zilan wine, *Tokay*, Vilani cuisine, and so on. The enormous number of plants and animals moved from their homeworlds to other places are bound to have interesting repercussions. Alien species will doubtless react to various compounds differently than Humans do. Are chilis toxic to Bwaps? Can Aslan stomach spaghetti? Can Humans eat Mollosian fire-berries and live to tell the tale? The question of Vargr tolerance for chocolate has been discussed (almost to death) in other fora (executive summary: Vargr can probably eat chocolate in similar quantities relative to their body mass as Humans, but individual reactions may vary tremendously). History and the so-called "real world" provide the GM with all sorts of quirky things about food (and other things). You never know what will prove to be useful, so (once again) I suggest stealing a suggestion from creative writing class: make notes. When you run across something quirky, odd, or unusual, even if you can't think how to use it, write it down. I do this myself, scribbling notes on odd pieces of paper, and later entering the notes into a computer file where they can be searched and cross-indexed (computers are fairly

good at that sort of thing). Little details like this can add immensely to the richness of a campaign, by contributing to what I like to call the "perceived reality" of the game. People will more willingly suspend their disbelief if the background seems realistic. Paradoxically, it is most often the odd and unusual details that reinforce the realism of a game.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Some people say that chili peppers are deadly. For many this adds to their appeal; my brother believes that if smoke doesn't come out his ears, the peppers aren't hot enough.

**A noted gourmet, an avid gardener, and one of the most paradoxical figures in American history—you may have heard of him?

May 22, 2002, Overlapping Interests

No single topic this time, just another of those meandering essays that indicate how my mind works (and which people seem to enjoy).

One of the inherent contradictions of my existence (it was recently pointed out to me) is that for a person whose interests are firmly rooted in the past, I spend a great deal of time meddling with a future, hypothetical universe. I* have discussed the considerable overlap between SF fans and history buffs before. We even did a survey on the subject not too long ago: the response indicated that a large number of **JTAS** subscribers are history fans—some said their interest in history exceeded their interest in science fiction.

This topic generated a nice little discussion on the **JTAS** boards, which new readers may inspect at their leisure. Most recently, I've been reading Stephen Ambrose's **Undaunted Courage,** a history of the **Lewis and Clark Expedition** disguised as a biography of Meriwether Lewis. The expedition is one of Ambrose's pet enthusiasms and the book is a compelling read (even though I already know what happened in the end). I picked the book up because I'm interested in the instructions Lewis received from Jefferson concerning fauna.

Thomas Jefferson was a naturalist of no small repute, and had previously written a paper on a beast now known as Megalonyx jeffersonii, based on some fragmentary remains that included three enormous claws and some associated small bones. Megalonyx is now known to be an extinct ground sloth (albeit a very large one), but Jefferson concluded (from the claws) that it was a type of lion. Jefferson believed (unlike Cuvier and others) that animals did not become extinct . . . in other words, one of the 18th Century's foremost scientific minds believed that whatever critter had those claws was still alive somewhere on the continent, perhaps in the vast, unexplored Louisiana territory. For many years, I wondered what instructions Lewis was given regarding this beast, and what his reaction was. Undaunted Courage provided me with a partial answer.

One can only imagine the reaction of an IISS explorer when told "We need an intact specimen of this 1,800-pound lion-like creature—try not to singe the hide too much."

A second area that dominates my own attention (and, from all evidence, that of a large proportion of Traveller fans as well) is all things military. I have never been in the military (the selective service never saw fit to call me up during the Vietnam era), but I have a long-standing and deeply-rooted interest in military history. In this, once again, I am not alone—a large portion (if not the majority) of **Traveller** campaigns focus on the military or quasi-military side of the far future. I think the reason for this is obvious—RPGs are descended from wargames, and the early game rules tended to focus on combat. In addition, the designers at **GDW** were wargamers before they were roleplayers, and this showed in the final game. Later on, **GDW** created one of the most successful military-themed RPGs, **Twi-**

light: 2000, which still has fans today (and actually outsold **Traveller f**or a time shortly after it was published).

My third major area is zoology—I was a history major/biology minor in college, and the combination drew stares when I took graduate level zoo courses. My primary interest is vertebrate paleontology, focusing on early mammals as well as dinosaurs (I own a reproduction Smilodon skull, as well as a few genuine fossils).

Anthropology is another interest of mine, and seems to be popular among **Traveller** fans as well—this interest manifests itself as an interest in physical anthropology and overlaps with history to form an interest in archeology.

I haven't been able to keep up with recent advances in my secondary interests (and, sometimes, not even in my main areas of interest). Fortunately, the basic facts of history seldom change (although new ones sometimes come to light)—it is the interpretation and weighting of those facts that change over the years, as well as the current thinking on various subjects.

Unlike many **Traveller** fans, however, I do not have a deep interest in mathematics, and no talent for it beyond the basic four functions (and anything involving more than two 2-digit numbers forces me to a calculator or pencil-and-paper). I have a small interest in those parts of chemistry and physics that do not involve math, and my interest in electronics and computers is not much more than I need to operate the assorted devices of my everyday life (I can program my own VCR, reset digital watches, and even change the date on my microwave oven without referring to the manual—I am less competent when it comes to computers, as my recent epic struggle with a non-functioning modem demonstrates).

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Long-time readers will notice that I do not use the "editorial we" in these discussions . . . Mark Twain gives editors permission, among others ("Only kings, editors and people with tapeworm have the right to use the editorial 'we'."), but I find it clumsy. Incidentally, I find certain of Mark Twain's writings to be highly relevant to modern life, even more than 100 years later. Anyone who has ever had an annoying melody (from a television commercial or the radio) stuck in their head will sympathize with the predicament he describes in **A Literary Nightmare** (**Atlantic Monthly**, February 1876). Remember, this is before the invention of radio, television, and the phonograph (Edison didn't market the device until the 1880s, although he invented it in 1877). Until I ran across this essay (in bound issues of **Atlantic Monthly** while researching **Space: 1889**) I had thought the "can't get it out of my head" curse was of much more recent origin.**

** How's that for a meandering discussion?

Jun 10, 2002, That Will Be Then, This Will Be Now

I know you were expecting a thousand words of profound sagacity from Loren as usual, but I'm afraid that this time you'll have to make do with me. My name is Graeme Davis, and I've been handling the day-to-day running of **JTAS** for a little while now. Loren will be back, but for now he's even more swamped than usual, and he told me that this would be a good time to do my "good to be aboard" speech.

So, here it is: it's good to be aboard. I'm having lots of fun doing what I'm doing at **JTAS**, and so far I've been very impressed by both the quality of the submissions that have come in (but we need more! MORE!!) and by how active the **Traveller** community is. Those of you who have heard of me before will probably know that I've been actively involved

with **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay** throughout its life, and that is another game that was kept alive by the dedication of its fans during a three-year hiatus after **Games Workshop** dropped it and before **Hogshead Publishing** picked it up. Dedicated gamers are the life-blood of this hobby. But you already knew that.

Another thing you'll know is that I have next to no **Traveller** writing or editing credits in the past—so what do I think I'm doing running **JTAS**? Well, you see, it's like this. Back in the late 70s, I was just another college student spending too much time on gaming. I played a lot of **Dungeons & Dragons,** and my group went on to the expensive new Advanced **Dungeons & Dragons**, and thence to **Bushido** and **Call of Cthulhu**. I collected and read the **Traveller** books, and was intrigued by the game and wanted to play it. But there was a hitch. No-one else in the group expressed any interest in refereeing a **Traveller** game, and I didn't dare. I was a lone archaeology student in a gaming group of physicists, and I knew that if I ran any kind of science fiction game, they would be talking me into all kinds of things. They would be walking around with pistols that fired point singularities and heaven knows what else, and I wouldn't have the knowledge to argue with them. At least, given the medieval-ish setting of fantasy games, I had the upper hand.

I suppose I could have looked around for another gaming group and joined a **Traveller** campaign that way, but I was already spending too much time on gaming, and I didn't know at the time that I'd end up working in the industry at all, let alone editing **JTAS**. (Believe me, it's second on the list for when I find a way to send messages to my younger self. Right after telling myself to stay away from a certain female theology student—but that's another story.) And since I had no experience playing **Traveller,** I didn't feel comfortable writing for it.

So that's my excuse. Since then, I've become fairly familiar with **GURPS**, and I'm now working on brushing up on classic **Traveller** game mechanics. The setting continues to intrigue me, with its almost endless possibilities and its general feel, and I'm as glad as anyone to see that it's still going.

Anyway, that's quite enough of that. You don't want to listen to my pathetic excuses, you want to read something interesting and thought-provoking.

Well, something that has always interested me is that way that science fiction very often mirrors the times in which it is written. All fiction and literature does so to a certain extent, of course, but maybe it's more noticeable with SF because it seeks to predict the future, and our hopes and fears for the future change according to present circumstances.

I suppose the most oft-quoted example is what I call the Mars Needs Women period of the 1950s and early 60s. In a world where everyone was afraid that the evil Communists would come and take everything they held dear, launching an era of brutal oppression across the whole world, there were an awful lot of SF stories where evil aliens came and took everything the protagonists held dear, leaving them fighting against an era of brutal oppression across the world.

Things changed in the late 60s and early 70s, and the prevailing theme became one of exploration and discovery, where alien races introduced spacefarers to new experiences, new ways of thinking, and often moral dilemmas. In books like **Stranger in a Strange Land,** films like 2001—and, of course, in the more cerebral episodes of the original **Star Trek**, **Our Heroes** explored themselves as much as they explored the universe, and questioned previously-held values just as the counterculture of the time questioned the validity of US foreign policy in Vietnam and sought self-actualization through a mixture of eastern spiritual practices and mind-altering drugs.

The passing of time brought us less cheerful stories. Starting with **Planet of the Apes,** **Rollerbal**l, and **Soylent Green**, the future became more to be feared than welcomed, because of what corporate self-interest and political corruption might mean for those who lived in future times. Gone was the optimism of **Star Trek**, with its racially-harmonious

world government and universal altruism. Perhaps this reached its peak in the cyberpunk genre, which—**Live Aid** aside—arguably reflected the cynicism of the 80s. From **Watergate** to **Iran-Contra**, the world seemed headed in a direction that few people liked.

Cyberpunk continued strong into the 90s, but it softened and became more moralistic as the years went by. There is a world of difference, for example, between William Gibson's cynical and self-serving **Case from Neuromancer** and Neo's butt-kicking crew of rebels from **The Matrix.** The future was still going to suck, but perhaps someone with the **Right Stuff** could do something about it. The present had its problems, to be sure, but people started to feel more responsible, and more able, if not to actually stop corruption and un-ethical business practices, at least to make a noise about it.

So here we are in the first years of the 21st century. What will the current decade bring us, and how will it be reflected in our hopes and fears for the future?

Graeme Davis
Editor, **JTAS**

P.S. Yes, I know this is awfully generalized and simplistic, but still, I find the correspon-dences interesting even if they aren't universal.

P.P.S. Yes, I know I didn't mention **Star Wars** once. The odds are, I haven't mentioned your favorite book or movie at all. Rather than being offended, think about how you feel it fits in.

Jun 24, 2002, Games vs Reality

Years ago, when the **GDW** staff and friends were playing one of our first sessions of **Dungeons & Dragons**, one of the first-time players asked about victory conditions. We muttered something about them being "open-ended," and one of us explained that each person created his own goals and conditions for victory.

"Right!" my friend said, "My goal will be to get enough gold together to buy a steam-ship ticket to New York and a pushcart full of apples, so I can get away from this *ferschl-uginer* place and live out my declining years in peace and quiet."

Over the years, it has dawned on me that the most enjoyable game situations (worlds, if you will) are not something we would choose to actually live in. I don't know about the rest of you, but the idea of really (as opposed to vicariously) earning my living as an inter-stellar merchant or high-tech mercenary does not appeal to me very much. I'm not very well suited (physically or temperamentally) to a life of action and adventure, and a my idea of an ideal night on the town does not include gunfire or a high-speed car chase that ends in a fiery explosion* (I reserve judgment on the inclusion of the femme fatale). The reverse is also true: even the high points of my life would make a pretty dull game (well, most of the high points, anyway—but I won't go into the exceptions). Even those people who have led interesting lives seldom achieve the levels attained by the average RPG character.

Gaming is, first and foremost, escapism. Most gamers, in my experience, play games to get away from their real life, not recreate it. My nephew is an EMT, and he seldom watches shows like **ER** or **Third Watch** on television, because he finds little entertainment in them. I'm inclined to suspect that something similar holds true for other "action" shows on TV—the familiar triad of cop shows, doctor shows, and lawyer shows, and combinations thereof. In a previous discussion, I dealt with a game where the characters were idealized version of the players, but the plot resembled reality only slightly.

There's a lot of "the grass is always greener . . . " principle at work here, I think. It makes me wonder if, when we actually get interstellar merchants and soldiers of fortune, what

kinds of games they will end up playing for relaxation?

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* I'm also a historical miniatures enthusiast, but I'm not anxious to actually lead a legion against the Parthians either.

Jul 08, 2002, From The Cutting Room Floor

The **Traveller Mailing List** is occasionally a source of editorial ideas for me. Recently, Doug Berry, (author of **Ground Forces** and currently working on another project for us) posted a suggestion for an editorial (which managed to sneak through between submissions to the giant ship design roundup contest that is in the process of winding down over there), and I decided to give it a try.

What Doug suggested was a discussion of ideas "from the cutting room floor"—things that were considered but which didn't make it into the original game for one reason or another.

The first one that comes to mind is a notion Marc had early in the design process that would have linked the lower-end roleplaying aspect of **Traveller** with a high-end strategic game. Prior to **Traveller**, our (**GDW**'s) experience had been with wargames, and Marc's idea was to give each player two characters: The first would have been a role-playing character, low down in the trenches, scrabbling for a daily existence. The second would have been a character in a position of authority. The intention was to decree that the two characters were related (father and daughter, mother and son, siblings, etc.). Marc's original notion was to create a strategic boardgame, and designate one of the counters as the fleet to which your "son" was assigned. You would then play Traveller in conjunction with the boardgame, and explore how the decisions of the high-level character effected the lower-level one (and vice versa). I don't know why the idea was never implemented. It could very easily have been made part of the Fifth Frontier War, especially since GDW (as a promotion for the game) issued "draft notices."

I had a slight variant on the way Jump worked, which I have discussed previously as part of a playtest "universe" I created (but which never really got off the ground). My thought was that Jump routes were like wormholes or gates, connecting two fixed points. You always entered and exited them in the same place (more or less). Jump routes were of different lengths (1-6 parsecs) and the normal rules about fuel and jump tapes applied, but if there was no known jump route to a particular system, the only other way to get there was via slower than light travel. Most of the routes were common knowledge, and jump tapes for them could be had almost anywhere, but a few routes (or, more properly, the tapes for those routes) were closely guarded secrets. My system would have worked well for a small campaign covering only a sector or two, but would have cluttered up a larger background, and it was not implemented.

A notion of Frank Chadwick's* that I have never seen used anywhere would have used a fixed text as a "random" encounter system. Under this arrangement, the mechanics of encounters, the layout of the land, and so on, were decided not by dice, but by letters, numerals, and punctuation marks—enabling a GM to use a favorite novel or story to determine the action. I think the main reason we never implemented this notion was that it was too "gimmicky"—the sole advantage over other mechanics would have been the "use your fa-

vorite story" marketing ploy.

One problem with trying to remember unused ideas is that so many of them have been created and discarded (for whatever reason) that it is tough to remember them all. Another problem is that ideas often resulted from communal design sessions, where they were proposed, discussed, and modified by several people, and it can be hard to credit a particular notion to a particular person. The main items of the background—information limited to the speed of travel, J-6 limit, and so on—were settled on at the start, and have remained unchanged since the beginning.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* At least, I think it was one of Frank's.

Jul 22, 2002, Historical Sources

Before getting to the meat of this week's **FTM**, I'd like to remind everyone that **Traveller** first went on sale on 22 July, 1977, and the powers that be have decreed that this date is **Traveller**'s birthday. Happy 25th, **Traveller** and many happy returns!

From time to time, someone notices that some aspect of **Traveller** bears a subtle (or, often, a not so subtle) resemblance to some person, place, or thing from the "real world." Some readers were surprised to learn that there really was a wine known as tokaj, for example, and the revelation that there really was a company known as *Hortalez et Cie* came as quite a surprise to many both on the **Traveller Mailing List** and the **JTAS** discussion boards.* Since the collective education of **GDW**'s design staff concentrated on Western European culture, we tended to focus on certain historical periods, but many of us made an effort to draw from a wide variety of sources. The concept of "client states" in the game is a close copy of the frontier policy of the Roman Empire. The condottieri of renaissance Italy provided us with part of the inspiration for mercenary activities within the Imperium. World names are drawn from a myriad sources, many of them historical.

One reason to do this sort of thing is as an "in joke." In the case of *Hortalez et Cie*, I needed a name of a megacorporation, and I had just read a book on the American Revolution. I could have made up something, but it would probably have been something like "StarBank Incorporated" or something equally lame. By choosing *Hortalez et Cie* instead, I have a mysterious-sounding name with the added thrill (from my point of view) that only a few people would recognize it and get the "joke." A part of this is also to impress well-informed readers with the breadth of your own knowledge (something I find less necessary as the years pass).

The main reason game designers and SF authors (and other sorts of authors as well) do this, however, is something I call it the "*You Can't Make Up Stuff This Good*" principle. Odds are that anything (except, perhaps for the really far out, bizarre notions) has happened somewhere, and taking "bits of business" from history is quicker, easier, and more likely to be internally consistent than making something up from scratch.

Besides, reality is so much stranger than most of us can imagine.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* And continues to do so. One of the joys (some would say curses) of the internet is that newbies pop in at regular intervals and continually make rediscoveries of the same stuff

again and again—it's a rare quarter that goes past without someone noticing that many features of the game background are drawn from the novels of Larry Niven, E. C. Tubb, Isaac Asimov, Andre Norton, *et al.***

    ** *Ad infinitum.****

    *** Q.E.D. abbreviation for the Latin *Quod Erat Demonstrandum,* normally translated as "That which was to be proven." Some wags have translated it as "Aha! Just as I suspected!" which is less accurate, but more exciting. Latin can be such fun! Those who wish to explore further may wish to look into Henry Beard's ***Lingua Latina Occasionibus Omnibus* (Latin for All Occasions**) and the zillion related works **Amazon**-dot-com will suggest to you.

Aug 05, 2002, Information

    Traveller has always been a game of information. One of the earliest reviews of the game noted that it did not have personal character improvement—within limits, characters did not get stronger, faster, and smarter during game play. Instead, the reviewer said, characters are rewarded with increased knowledge about the universe (which he thought was a good thing). At the time, it was a unique idea (and it was a conscious decision on the part of the designers: in the,"real world" people don't continually get stronger, smarter, and more dexterous). In subsequent permutations of the rules, allowance was made for character advancement, but the general principle still holds.

    A connected feature of **Traveller** is this: a majority of players and GMs are computer literate, and no small number are involved in information technology. Many have created "in game" databases/libraries/whatever for use by the players to relieve some of the load on the GM. This is an interesting concept, but falls down in one key aspect. It does not decrease the load on the average GM—it increases it immensely.

    Players being what they are, they expect information on everything, all at once. They expect to go online from an untraceable link, hack their way into the central databank containing construction blueprints (including all ventilator shafts, sewers, and anything else large enough for their character to crawl through), preferably one that highlights in glowing yellow the ventilator shaft that leads into the otherwise impregnable bank vault. They expect this to be hyperlinked to a map of the routes taken by the security guards (including a schedule of when they will be away from the grille that allows admission to the ventilator system). Naturally, the GM is expected to have this prepared ahead of time. For a few buildings (or starports, or worlds, or systems), this is not too onerous a burden. The problem comes when players want to know every tiny detail of every system within dozens of jumps, so they can decide where they want to send their characters. Many GMs will be familiar with the following cycle:

    Create a detailed world, with many intricate plotlines and adventure hooks. Present the players with the world.

    Watch as the players search for cargo, buy cargo, and move on to the next world. Repeat.

    In a way, **Traveller** encourages this kind of behavior on the part of the adventurers—consider the name of the game. The game was not originally intended to have a new world every adventure, however. Our playtests settled on a few systems, even the mercantile campaigns. It was only later, after the game had been out a while, that the Third Imperium background was created, and it is only with the advent of home computers and database programs that detailed background information on hundreds of worlds becomes even remotely feasible.

There are several solutions to the problem of information overload (I am rejecting out of hand the "make every place identical" solution).

Create It All Yourself. I suppose there are people who can do this, and keep an interesting campaign going, but I certainly could not. Perhaps if I had nothing else to do but make stuff up, and didn't have to earn a living, have a social life (or even leave the apartment once in awhile), and actually game, I might be able to write it all up.

Wing it. I'll admit this is the system I used more often than not (on those rare occasions when I GM—I'm pretty bad at it, so I try to minimize my efforts). Frank Chadwick was perfect at this sort of thing: he could create something on the fly better than anyone I ever encountered. He could dash off a city layout or a military base in a couple of minutes, and sketch it out on paper in as much detail as was needed. One aspect of this method is that you simplify whenever possible, making use of a principle I outlined in an earlier discussion: "Your character knows, but you don't." Some players find this the least satisfying option. Partly, this is because they can't manipulate the universe as much as they would like if they don't have detailed knowledge of it (an argument that doesn't carry much weight with me, I fear).

Let Someone Else Create It. Whether this means you buy it in the form of a sourcebook (a popular option) or lift portions from another GM, this remains the most popular option. The advantages are that you don't have to come up with it, that others can often come up with things you didn't think of, and it is simply a lot less work. The disadvantage is that someone else's campaign may not transfer over to yours with a perfect fit (although making it fit is less work than creating it from scratch). This category also includes borrowing from the real world, sometimes changing a few things here and there. For a sample set of building plans, try this link (created by the **US Army Corps of Engineers**, and discovered by Chris Thrash)—you can discover others on your own.

The best method, I think, is to use a combination of all of the above, and to avoid campaigns that encourage people to travel from one end of the Imperium to another (unless they never leave the starports).

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

Aug 19, 2002, In *Cinema Veritas*?

First, a personal note: for those who care, I finally got my last skid of stuff delivered from the storage locker in Illinois. I now have a living room full of cartons labeled "Books" or "Games" or "Magnetic media—Do Not X-Ray" and nowhere near enough bookshelves to handle them all (I was forced to abandon most of my furniture in Illinois, although my sister managed to find a use for a lot of it*. I hope to open and sort through all of it over the next couple of weekends. Totaling the assorted weights together, I estimate I had about 2,100 pounds of books (just under a metric ton), plus another few hundred pounds of clothing and assorted household goods (my sister brought my TV and VCR down in her minivan shortly after I moved). Which brings me, in a roundabout way, to my topic for this issue:

In Cinema Veritas?

I like movies, as do many gamers. Movies can serve as inspiration for gaming in several ways (and thus you have an excuse to watch as many as possible).

Situations: Movie plots can sometimes be lifted for RPG adventures (sometimes even campaigns). These need not be science fiction movies, almost any genre can provide an in-

teresting **Traveller** plot, because **Traveller** has more scope than most other RPGs. Action/ adventure movies are an obvious choice, but mysteries, "caper" movies, westerns, "easterns," political and criminal thrillers, anime, and the ever popular war movies are also grist for the GM's mill. An advantage of choosing a film that isn't science fiction is it reduces the chance that the players will be familiar with the plot and spoil their surprise.

Characters: Another advantage of using movies for inspiration is that it is easy to get a handle on the behavior and motivations of a wider range of characters. Again, expand the field beyond SF films, and take characters from the full range of films available.

Backgrounds and Overall Ambiance: This is the situation where GMs will probably want to limit themselves to science fiction films for backgrounds and the like.

Soundtracks: Cool movies often have cool soundtracks. Otherwise forgettable movies sometimes have cool soundtracks. An individual cut need not always be anything related to the original movie: Frank Chadwick once set the scene for a WWII miniatures game involving an attack by a Soviet Tank Brigade by playing the **Imperial March** (aka Darth Vader's theme) from **The Empire Strikes Back.** We all knew that something very heavy was coming down even before the **KV-II**s appeared. Music during rpg sessions can set the mood, provided it doesn't interfere with play (don't turn the volume knob to "11" for example). You can indicate tension, mystery, action, and so on with some careful selections from assorted soundtracks. Listen to the music with your mind's eye, and see what images the music inspires.

Besides getting to see a lot of good films, using them in your games means that you get twice the enjoyment from a film.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* For those of you who don't know, I was unable to afford to move all of my possessions to Texas when I took the job here with **SJ Games** in 1998. I put it in a storage locker in Illinois, and arranged with a friend of mine to ship portions of it to me from time to time. When I packed it all, I very carefully labeled each box and kept an inventory list of what was in each, so I knew which boxes to request first, and which to leave until later. I then managed to leave the list in the apartment in Illinois! Opening each carton brings a sense of exploration and discovery: "Alright! T**he Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XII: Imperial Crisis and Recovery**! I wondered where that went."

Sep 01, 2002, Levels of Detail

Here's something I can't really wrap my mind around: The notion that a game designer must work out every single minor detail in advance. I first ran into this with **Traveller** almost 20 years ago, but I soon encountered it in association with other games.

Flash back to a large summer gaming convention, many years ago. Marc, Frank, John Harshman and I are in a **Traveller** panel discussion, and the field is opened to questions. After the usual bunch, one of the audience asks "How does jump drive work?"

Marc responds with a summary of the game mechanics involved, and the fan interrupts, saying that what he wants is not how it works in the game, but a summary of the physics involved. Marc says that the jump drive moves the ship outside of ordinary space where the laws of physics are different, and the fan interrupts again, with more detailed questions about the specific processes. John Harshman (who attended CalTech) takes over, and spins some handwaves off the top of his head, but the fan persists in wanting details. John finally gives up, and says "We don't have a blueprint of the thing." The fan wants to

know why not. John says: "Look, if we knew how to build one, do you think we'd be publishing games?"

The seminar moved on to other topics, but to this very day, I encounter fans who seem to be convinced that the designers of **Traveller** really have all the technical details worked out, but we are deliberately keeping them a secret for some unaccountable reason. A lot of this comes under a general principle that I have yet to name, but which can be summarized as "T*his problem has been solved, but I don't know how.*"

For example: Characters in **Traveller** spend a great deal of time in vacc suits—days at a time, sometimes. Present-day spacesuits have relatively primitive sanitary arrangements,* and none of these are really suitable for long-term (or even repeated) use. For game purposes, we assumed that the problem was solved in a satisfactory fashion—what that solution is, however, remains unknown to us. We may speculate, and hazard best guesses, but in the end it is useless to do so. People have been in space for thousands of years in the **Traveller** setting, so the problem has been solved. The characters know everything about the subject, but their controlling players do not.

Another example: Fusion power is common in the game, but we don't really know precisely how a fusion reactor is laid out. The general theory has been established, but we still don't have a commercially viable fusion reactor in operation. But we have already established that this is the primary source of power in Traveller, so the game assumes that the engineering problems must have been solved—we just don't say how.

There are many reasons for this, but the main one that is that game designers cannot take the time to work everything out in minute detail, or the game would never be published. Marc, Frank, John, and I were reasonably intelligent and reasonably well-educated, but we did not have the requisite knowledge to detail the physics of space travel—even if we had felt it was necessary—let alone work out totally rational economic and political systems for an 11,000-world empire and its neighbors, plus the biology of hundreds of intelligent aliens and millions of alien plant and animal species. None of us were engineers, and we tended towards the soft sciences (Marc's degree was in chemistry, admittedly, but Frank's was communication, mine was in history, and John Harshman eventually got a doctorate in zoology). There are certain things we just assumed in order to make the game work. From time to time, different people made different assumptions, and occasionally these assumptions were contradictory.

Another problem with the "work it all out" approach is that it never ends. For every detail we nail down, three more problems arise. The more detail we added to the process for creating star systems and the worlds inside them, the more complex those systems became. Every time someone publishes an article on the formation of planets, there is another demand to "fix" the system.

Many people find this "your character knows but you don't" approach unsatisfactory. I can understand this—the reason they can't stand not knowing is basically the same curiosity that drives advances in the sciences, and the vast majority of **Traveller** fans have backgrounds in the hard sciences. At some point, you just have to accept the handwave and get on with it. The problem arises because people have different ideas of where that point is. I wish I had a blueprint of an air/raft . . . I'd make a fortune off the patents on that one!

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* A good short primer on the subject can be found on the **Straight Dope** website. It probably does not go into enough detail for some readers (there are no blueprints), but it outlines the problem and the various interim solutions (and is reasonably up to date).

Sep 16, 2002, The Mundane and The Exotic

I'm writing this shortly after I return from **DragonCon.** This year, one of the panels I was on (as it turns out, it was the only panel I was on—but that's another story) was titled **Game Design: Beyond the Dice**. Jordan Weisman (formerly of **FASA**, now the brains behind **MageKnight** *et al.*) and I were supposed to do an hour on how to create a successful game design. We had no time to prepare any sort of presentation,* so we winged it, and it seemed to go over well.

Taking our cue from the seminar's descriptive subtitle, **How to Create a Successful Game Design**, we talked about what we thought made a game design successful. We led off with a discussion of the importance of background, during which we discussed how a good background should combine (in Jordan's words) the mundane and the exotic, in such a way that people will want to (vicariously) visit it repeatedly. "But," as one of the audience asked, "why does a science fiction game need mundane elements?"

Our answer was so coordinated you might have thought we planned it in advance: the mundane elements in a game's background give the players a feeling of familiarity, and make the exotic elements stand out more. If everything is a game were strange, new, and totally unknown, the majority of players wouldn't be able to "connect" to the background— the whole universe is bizarre and unfamiliar, and nobody has any idea where to start or what kind of adventures are possible (and most fun). Even M. A. R. Barker's T**ekumel** from **Empire of the Petal Throne** has its mundane elements. Even the most far-out backgrounds need their shoe salesmen (although they make lousy PCs) to serve as a baseline for the interesting parts. In some ways, the approach is like my father's opinion on climate: you never truly appreciate a nice, comfortably warm summer without the memory of a near-arctic winter to serve as a contrasting element.

Traveller's background was designed to be familiar to our target audience (there are those who claim it was too familiar—the so-called "*Yanks in Space*" criticism). We imagined that using a starship was similar to using a steamship, and patterned things accordingly (well, actually, we folded air travel into the mix). Without our having to describe it in detail, referees and players figured out that starship passengers needed to buy tickets, travel to their ship's "dock," board it, and so on.

Back in the stone age, when I played my first games of **D&D**, I noticed a minor discontinuity with the way pre-modern society worked: the shops. In every game I played in, if I wanted a sword (two-handed, of course) or a suit of armor (plate, of course) I walked into a shop and selected something from a huge rack of stock—just like a modern department store. It struck me at the time that this was not the way pre-modern craftsmen worked. If you wanted a sword, you went to a smith (preferably one who specialized in swords) and had him make you one, carefully fitted to your build and requirements. The notion of buying something pre-made was almost unheard of.** The idea of a general store where a variety of products could be had was almost as odd. The reason everyone did it this way, however, was simple: everybody knew that was how stores worked. No DM could afford to take the time and mental energy to explain how something as mundane as "buying things." That had to remain part of the mundane, everyday background, in order to save mental energy for the really fantastic stuff.

So what's the point? Mainly that designers shouldn't be criticized because their backgrounds have things that seem familiar. It is generally intentional, and generally a good thing. Now if Jordan and I can just get another 11 hours worth of material, we can start that Game Designer Correspondence Course and really start raking the money in!

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* OK, truth be told, we weren't able to take much time to prepare a presentation. Our preparation consisted of: 1) exchanging greetings while we waited outside the hall for the previous presentation to end (someone's computer-generated art video ran overtime). 2) Confessing that neither of us had a clue what the panel was supposed to be about. 3) reading the capsule description on the sign outside. 4) conversing for about half a minute on what we thought constituted the core of the subject matter, as revealed by the aforesaid capsule description.

** Few craftsmen before 1800 had any kind of a stock built up—most of them couldn't afford to maintain that kind of an inventory. If your work involved subassemblies (like the links for chain mail) you might make those up in advance.

Sep 27, 2002, Televisual Musings

The recent premier of Joss Whedon's **Firefly** television series got me thinking (again) about what it would take to get **Traveller** on television (I will not go into the question of whether **Firefly** is really science fiction or not—it is what television calls science fiction, and that is what is important here). There are several hurdles to be overcome:*

Finding a network interested in running the series. This is no small problem, even assuming we have a pilot and the initial batch of episodes filmed and ready to show. It is a firmly-held belief among some television executives that science fiction series don't do well on television (albeit with some rather significant exceptions). There are several reasons for this, and I don't plan on going into them. Thousands of people every year approach the existing networks and production companies with ideas—very few of them actually make it. FOX seems more willing to experiment with unusual formats, and the Sci-Fi Channel is an obvious market, but all the major networks have run SF shows in the past. Having someone with a track record of successes associated with the show would help in no small way (hmmmm . . . how many **Traveller** fans are world-famous directors?).

Finding (or starting) a production company to make the pilot and the initial episodes. Perhaps my naïveté is showing here, but I have always assumed (and continue to do so) this was primarily a matter of connections and/or money—if I had a few million to spend or knew which ears to whisper into, I suspect I could interest a number of people in a **Traveller** project. Part of the deal would need to be a first-class special effects house capable of working within the weekly budget (which, initially at least, would not be enormous). Sadly, this probably means relatively humanoid aliens (i.e., "people with stuff glued to their faces") for the most part, although we can probably get away with one recurring Vargr character or similar alien (assuming that most of the scenes don't show his legs in action). Starships and space shots are well within a television series budget, provided they are done efficiently. Ditto for extraterrestrial backdrops and such.

Getting the screenplays written is not really an obstacle assuming there is a budget available. The **WGA** has many many members who are constantly looking for assignments. The challenge will be maintaining the overall storyline (which I am convinced is a necessity for a successful SF series—**Babylon 5** blazed the trail here).

No one associated with **Traveller** has any connections in the film or television industry (at least not that I know of), and few of us have any track record with novels or screenplays. This is a major strike against us (I read once that if you are over 40, you should give up any hope of selling a novice screenplay—this could discourage me if I let it).

On the plus side, however:

The **Traveller** background is one of the most fully developed RPG backgrounds in existence, and it compares favorably with many SF novel series in this respect. It has many features that could be woven into a very interesting television series. The usual notion is that the main characters would form the crew of a **Free Trader**, and travel from world to world, but this general format (starship+crew+wandering) has been used so much it has begun to get a little stale, in my opinion. Fortunately, the background can provide for numerous other situations, any of which can provide a suitable background for a series. The main problem will be creating a unique and interesting collection of characters and a "story arc" that will appeal to a wide variety of viewers (I have some thoughts along these lines, but I won't go into them here).

If **Firefly** is a success, the powers that be will be more likely to underwrite similar projects in the future. Given the director's track record, there is reason to be hopeful, but given the ability of television to destroy good (in my opinion) programming, there is reason to be pessimistic also.

Like most things, we'll have to wait, and see, and continue to dream.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Not the least of which is finding an appropriate analogy for the pitch. Every movie has to be described as "It's [insert title here] meets [insert second title here]." It sounds like a joke, but I am assured** it is very real: **Outland** meets **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. Yellowbeard** meets **Jurassic Park**. **Ice Pirates** meets **Casablanca**. **Oedipus Rex** meets **Popeye**. Whatever.

** By books on screen writing . . . ***

***Well, by some books on screen writing, anyway. I've never actually pitched a screenplay at anyone, so I don't know for sure what happens during one.

Oct 13, 2002, Maneuvers and Maneuverers

Over the years, I have run into a type of gamer that I find mildly annoying, and I've decided to take advantage of this forum to talk about it. I hope those who recognize themselves in my discussion will take solace in the fact that I have been this type of gamer in the not-so-distant past.

A common magazine feature for gaming publications is the "How to Win at . . . " article. The best of these articles deal with general principles that can be applied to games in general or to a specific game. The worst of them are sometimes known in boardgaming circles as the "perfect plan" and do not deal with real-life strategies and tactics that can be employed in game situations—these are specific "P to K4*" type instructions designed by rules-lawyers to exploit certain aspects of the game rules.

I first ran into articles of this type in publications devoted to miniatures, but they occur everywhere. I remember one especially annoying article devoted to ancient battles. The author described a series of "gamey" maneuvers designed to exploit the printed rules with no thought given to authenticity or historical accuracy. One of these "tricks" involved taking eight (no more and no less) horse archer figures, and running them in a U-shaped, single file path in front of a line of enemy troops, exactly 4 inches away from a point two-thirds of the way from the left flank, firing each figure in turn as it made its closest approach. According to the author's interpretation of the rules, this would cause 3 (no more, no less) figures from the center of the formation to uncontrollably charge (the author described the action

as "like a magnet pulling iron filings"), breaking the line and converting the unit into a mob, which could then be destroyed by a carefully-coordinated cavalry charge.

I particularly disliked the fact that every one of the plans required careful measurement (sometimes several measurements) and tactics of the sort that could not have been accomplished in the ancient world. There is no way for a band of galloping horsemen to know they are exactly 120 paces away from a line of infantry (and that no more than 160 of them approach that close at any given time), unless the distances were carefully paced off in advance** ("Don't mind me, I'll just be a minute. Would you hold this end of the measuring tape for a couple of minutes? Just while I drive these marking stakes. Thanks!").

I find this sort of thing less annoying the more abstract the game is, which leads me to believe this is the historian in me reacting against the implausibility of it all. Chess (at which I am terrible, by the by), abounds in "perfect plans," standard openings and the like, and chess is about as abstract as a historical simulation gets (or is it about as historical as an abstract game gets?). In my miniatures games, I like to remain reasonably close to history. I find the practice—common among wargamers who specialize in the ancient era—of matching armies from different periods mildly unpleasant. I find playing against nit-picking rules lawyers a less than pleasant experience, but playing against "history, schmistory" types sets my teeth on edge.

In the past, however, I was guilty of all of these things: when I was in my teens, shortly after I had discovered wargames, I weaseled with the best of them—I remember creating my own "perfect plan" for the old **Avalon Hill** game **Afrika Korps**, carefully calculated to make maximum use of the supply rules as the advance elements of the **21st Panzer Division** rolled into Benghazi, blasting through the meager British garrison like a dose of salts (like most 17-year-old Yanks, I chose the Germans for my "perfect plans"). In later years, I discovered my plan to be possessed of certain inadequacies (like using up all my supplies in an initial flurry of spoiling attacks, and laying myself open to a counterattack by a clever opponent)—like most "perfect plans," mine was anything but.

In RPGs, I find the "perfect plan" people tend toward min-maxing various aspects of their characters and equipment, and they are thus devoted students of every jot and tittle in the rules. A slightly different set of RPG devotees study the starship combat rules so as to be able to put create the perfect ship, sometimes going on to create the perfect fleet, and afterwards the ever-victorious navy. Years ago, when the group that would become **GDW** was gathering several times a week to play various games, one of our favorites was **Don't Give Up the Ship,** a game of 18th and early 19th century naval combat. John Harshman and I spent several weeks immersed in the rules, and several more weeks "dissecting" dozens of Napoleonic-era ships. At the end of that time, we created the "perfect" vessel, one we felt was the best compromise of size, speed, and firepower. I've forgotten the details, but she could basically outshoot anything she couldn't outrun—until she was run aground on a reef off a lee shore during a gale by a 104-gun ship-of-the-line. She was battered to kindling within a few hours, which was most satisfying to the 104, which had been chasing her for several game months during the campaign. The campaign ended before any of our other designs could be tested.

Traveller has attracted a large number of technogeeks over the years, and it comes as no surprise to me to find new "perfect designs" popping up at regular intervals. I am overjoyed that **Traveller** has yet to produce anything as annoying as the pre-measurement crowd, however. Although . . .

During a game I was once running (I believe it may have been during the **Twilight: 2000** playtests or during one of the convention demos shortly after the game was published), one of the players decided to demonstrate what he perceived to be a flaw in the combat rules by announcing that his character intended to shoot himself in the head three

times. I pronounced his character dead after his first shot, without rolling the dice. He complained, and began quoting the combat rules. I said that as referee, the rules were my guidelines, and I was free to diverge from them as I choose. "No rules can cover every conceivable situation in complete detail," I said, "some things still have to left up to the referee's judgment." This was one of Frank Chadwick's guiding principles, and probably one of the most important—the only close rival is "No arguments over the rules while the game is in session." I was forced to quote that one in the same session—I don't think the player was happy.

I am deliberately not speculating on the motivations behind "perfect plans." I can think of several, and it would be too complicated to go into them. Suffice to say, I am not especially interested in hearing how one sentence in the rules makes it impossible for one side to lose (granted, sometimes it is true, but not as often as some people seem to think).

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* In the old days (using what I was taught was the English Notation), this would have been written "*King's Pawn to King's four*" (soon shortened to "P*awn to King's four*"). It more modern times (algebraic or continental notation), it is written "e2-e4" and they've doubtless compressed it even more than that by now—eventually, I suppose they will number all the possible opening moves, so that "P-K4" is "1" (or perhaps not).

** In case you haven't figured out, I have an intense dislike for miniatures games that allow pre-measurement, especially the "I'll advance until I'm just outside of canister range" variety. I suspect many generals in years past wished they could perform feats like this.

Oct 28, 2002, Milieu 1935

I've been meaning to write something like this for a while, but I wasn't sure I could carry it off. Frankly, I'm not sure if I did or not—the Gentle Readers (as Isaac Asimov used to call them) will have to judge for themselves.

OK, suppose RPGs existed in the 1930s—imagine the scene as young GM Isaac Asimov pitches his latest game universe to the others in his game club (meeting in a back room at the FLGS*):

The young Asimov enters, laden beneath several bulging notebooks and an enormous, rubber-banded stack of 3" x 5" index cards. He staggers over to the table where his gaming group is arguing over who's turn it is to referee tonight and deposits the pile of books with a resounding thud.

Morrie: "Hey, Isaac—whatcha got?"

Isaac: "The stuff for my new campaign. I've been working on it all month."

Morrie: "I thought you had a term paper due next week?"

Isaac: "Plenty of time for that."

Morrie: "I wish I could crank 'em out like you can."

Robert: "So what's this campaign about?"

Isaac: "Well, there's this enormous interstellar empire—it takes up the whole galaxy . . . and it's been around for thousands of years, and is starting to collapse. I got the idea after Mr. Haggerty assigned Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire for 4th period History, but I'm changing a bunch of stuff,"

Al: "An empire that takes up the whole galaxy?"

Isaac: "Yep."

Al: "Wow! What's their annual budget?"

Isaac: "Budget? I dunno. Zillions of dollars . . . anyway, there's this scientist who's developed a means of applying math to predict history, and he's decided that the empire is gonna collapse, and take everything down into a 10,000 year dark age, so he's got this plan . . . "

Al: "They use dollars?"

Isaac: "OK, call 'em credits . . . anyway, this scientist guy figures out a way to cut the dark age down to only 1,000 years, but . . . "

Robert: "Credits sounds nice and sci-fi. A whole galaxy full of worlds must have quite an interstellar commerce system built up . . . "

Isaac: ". . . but he needs to establish a special organization to . . ."

Ron: "Are they going to put an army into suspended animation and emerge 1,000 years later and restore civilization?"

Isaac: "No! Anyway, this organization has to be funded, so he goes to the Imperial capital—I call it Trantor . . . "

Robert: "Capital? Wow, for an empire that big, it must be enormous!"

Isaac: "It takes up a whole world."

Al: "A whole world?"

Isaac: "Not all the way through."

Al: "The whole surface?"

Isaac: "Except for the Emperor's palace, yeah."

Al: "Totally covered with buildings and roads and stuff?"

Isaac: "Well, the roads are probably underground tunnels, and there's a lot of aircraft that use rocket engines."

Robert: "I'm still trying to get a handle on the economy. How does interstellar trade work?"

Isaac: "Wha . . . I don't know. There are starships that travel from world to world . . . "

Robert: "Faster than lightspeed, of course?"

Isaac: "Of course! You have to go faster than light or you can't have a reasonable game."

Ron: "Sprague was in the other day talking about a campaign he was gonna run where ships travel only at lightspeed . . . he only had a few systems, though. It sounded pretty good. The women all walk around without any clothes, and . . . "

Al: "How do you handle the heat from that world city?"

Robert: "How do the FTL drives work?"

Isaac: "I don't know . . . the ship goes to a universe where the laws of physics are different . . . "

Ron: "Wow! Can we explore that universe?"

Isaac: "No, I don't want to have to create another universe just so you can poke around in it."

Al: "About this world city, what are your sewage disposal plants like?"

Isaac: "I don't know—why is that important?"

Al: "Well, sewage disposal is a vital component of . . . "

Isaac: "Why is it important to the game? Are you going to try to have your character sneak through the sewers at some point?"

Al: "No, I was just curious how . . . "

Ron: "Can you track a ship while it's in hyperspace?"

Isaac: "I hadn't really thought that far . . . "

Ron: "Can you have battles while you're in hyperspace?"

Isaac: "I hadn't given it much thought . . . "

Robert: "So, this massive interstellar trade that's going on, what's it in? There can't be much market for basic elements, 'cause those are everyplace—metal ores, stuff like that. Luxury goods, of course, are always in season, and rare gems, artwork, that sort of thing."

Al: "I don't know about you, but I don't care about interstellar trade patterns. Now, about the heat disposal problem . . . "

Robert: "Shut up about the heat thing. What about the economics?"

Isaac: "Well, like I said, I haven't given that part of it much thought . . ."

Robert: "You just assumed everybody'd want to be part of the 'Plan to Save Civilization' instead of wanting to be merchants or soldiers?'"

Isaac: "Well . . . yeah . . . there's plenty of opportunities for adventure, and I have this really great plot twist for later on . . . "

Robert: "Does it have anything to do with psychic powers?"

Isaac: "How'd you know?!"

Robert: "Lucky guess. You never have psychic powers in any of your games, so I figured you'd do it to surprise us."

Isaac mutters something under his breath.

Ron: "I'd like to know more about the faster-than-light travel . . . "

Al: "I don't see how you can even think FTL travel is more important than the question of the excess heat generated by a world-city's power plants . . . "

Robert: "Commerce is the foundation of any civilization! How can you possibly . . . "

Ron: "No, technology is the foundation. If anything, commerce is the second foundation."

Al: "Don't forget the empire."

Isaac: "I give up! You guys have no appreciation of the work that goes into the creation of an interesting game background . . . "

Al: "If it's so interesting, why don't you write a novel about it!"

Isaac: "Maybe I will!"

Robert: "Write three of 'em while you're at it?"

Isaac: "Maybe I will!"

Isaac picks up his books and leaves.

Ron: "OK, who's got a better idea for a world. Where's Tolkey? He had an idea for a fantasy world that sounded pretty interesting, but I'm a little concerned he hasn't given any consideration at all to import/export ratios."

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, JTAS

* The acronym stands for "*Friendly Local Game Store,*" which the readership will also have to imagine as existing in the 1930s—it is only a slightly greater stretch of your disbelief suspenders.**

** A useful fashion accessory for every SF fan, along with the propeller beanie (if you're not wearing a propeller beanie, people look at you like you're weird) and a pair of inflatable shoes.

Nov 11, 2002, Flying Dutchman

One of **GDW**'s proofreaders once remarked that proofreaders were like a combination of the legendary Flying Dutchman and Sisyphus—eternally doomed to search out and correct mistakes, only to have them magically reappear in a different place.

Very little is ever created perfect the first time around, and this is especially true of game rules. Typos creep in despite the best efforts to eliminate them,* and grammatical mistakes are only slightly less elusive. Above all of these are imprecise descriptions of the rule mechanics and problems with the mechanics themselves. I became convinced, many

years ago, that (with very few exceptions) an author is poorly suited to proofread his own writing, especially where the clarity of game rules are concerned. Something that is crystal clear to me is often very murky to others.

Years ago, before **Traveller** was published, **GDW** created board wargames, including the now legendary **Europa Series****. After the first couple had been published, we began to receive letters from fans with questions about the rules. Some of these letters were extremely long—I remember one that was over 15 pages, both sides. We decided to select a few of these fans who seemed the most lucid and let them see our next game prior to publication, feeling that in this way we could come closer to achieving perfection. Many fans had written letters offering their services as proofreaders. We selected three who seemed most likely to be helpful—one of them was (or at least claimed to be) a contract lawyer.

Fan number one (the contract lawyer) returned the draft with his regrets, but he had just changed jobs, and was unable to help us after all. We never heard from fan number two. Fan number three called to say he had received the draft, and promised to return it with his remarks in a few weeks. He was as good as his word, and returned the draft with every page covered with red marks correcting punctuation, and accompanied by an enormous letter with numerous annotations and suggestions on how to revise certain sections of the rules for maximum clarity.

We revised the manuscript according to his suggestions, and Frank suggested we should send the revised draft to the fan again—"send it through the filter twice," he said. We did.

A few weeks later, we received the revised revised draft. Again, it was covered with red marks correcting punctuation and grammar. It was accompanied by a letter equal in size to his first one, suggesting more clarifications and revisions. We revised the revision, and again sent it to our fan.

Can you tell where this is going?

The fan's comments on the third draft were as extensive as his revisions on the first two. We had every reason to believe that this would continue for as long as we sent him drafts—a careful comparison of the assorted versions convinced Frank that we were not simply introducing new errors as we corrected the old ones (something that happens more often than any of us in the industry would like)—our helper was becoming increasingly picky with each revision. This was our initial experience with outside playtesters. We did, eventually, discover people who had valid, useful contributions to make (to our boardgames, at least), and we began to make use of them. In this case, however, publication was delayed for several weeks, and we still had fans complain that they could have eliminated all errors if only they had been allowed to see the draft . . .

GDW eventually acquired an in-house typesetting and playtesting staff. What I learned from the experience was twofold. First, many of the people who volunteer to help you cannot be counted on in the crunch (witness the fan we never heard from again). Second, if you continue to look for errors, you will continue to find them, but you never find all of them, and you reach a point of diminishing returns. There is a point where you have to decide that you have done your best, and send the product off. You need to have a reasonable number of different brains go over the product, preferably including at least one who was totally uninvolved in its creation. You need to resist the urge to send a product out too soon (**GDW** sometimes fell into this trap).

A major problem I've noticed in myself lately is that spell-checking software has caused my spelling to deteriorate. Since I know I can run it through a spell-checking program, I tend to take less care—this shows up mostly in my e-mails, as I do not have software that checks my spelling as I type (unlike the word processors I use). The great trap of spell-checking software, of course, is that it will not catch the wrong word properly spelled.

In the late 70s, I bought a copy of **The Killer Angels** by Michael Shaara. I noticed a minor but glaring error. The word "there" was spelled "their"—a correct spelling but a wrong word, and the sort of error a spell-checker will not catch easily. Years later, when the book was made into a movie by Ted Turner, I bought a second copy, and discovered that the book still had the same typo in the same place, even though it was a different edition. If a major publisher couldn't (or didn't—I'm not sure which) correct such a glaring mistake in two decades, I don't feel so bad at letting something more subtle slip past.

A small part of the problem is that one person's "dumb mistake" is another person's "cherished canon," but these tend to be either minor questions of background or easily worked around.

In the early days of **Traveller,** we (**GDW)** could count on reprinting the core booklets numerous times (I have a copy of **Mercenary** that indicates it is from the 20th printing of that book!). Certain of our fans wondered why we did not take advantage of these numerous reprintings to correct minor errors. Economics enters into the equation. Most of the cost of printing something is paying the salaries of the assorted skilled workers that are involved in preparing a book for printing. For a reprint, this work has already been done. You need merely tell your printer "*Run another X,000*" and all you will pay is the cost of the paper, ink, and the pressman's time—unless you want something changed. I don't really have the room to go into the details of the process of getting a book printed. Many things have changed radically in the printing industry in the last 20 years, but much of the essential economics remain the same.

If it were all just a matter of highlighting the error and retyping it, a lot of people's lives would be easier.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* There is a saying in the printing business: "*Your tombstone will have typo on it.*" I have first-hand experience with this, as my paternal grandfather's tombstone did have a typo on it—the stonecutter had transposed two numbers in his birth date—fortunately, the contract with the mortuary covered this eventuality.

** This was a series of games that covered the European theater of WWII at division level, and sparked the "mega-Game" craze of the late 1970s. The combined maps covered an area about 12'x 14' and depicted an area running from east of the Urals to the Atlantic, and from the northern edge of the Sahara northwards into the Arctic (each hex representing 16 miles/20 kilometers). The games are still played today.

Nov 25, 2002, Then and Now 3

Partly inspired from suggestions on the discussion board (I asked for ideas on editorial topics, since I was more than a little stuck for inspiration), I thought a short discussion of how things used to be done and how they are done now might be entertaining.* So here's a rundown on how a game book is created, then and now, going through the various stages:

Stage One: The Beginning

Then: Ideas for books came from all sources (as I have noted elsewhere). In the early days of **Traveller**, there were no guidelines and no formal line plan—anyone at **GDW** who had an idea for a book went to Marc and proposed it. Marc kept a list of ideas (sometimes nothing more than a title, sometimes a short summary) and added to it from time to time.

Sometimes the ideas came from outside sources—fan suggestions, submissions from free-lance authors, etc. Marketing entered the picture only to the extent that Marc and Frank decided we needed a given title on a given subject. Titles were published when they were finished.

Later on, it became necessary to plan things a little more. Marc, who was in charge of the **Traveller** line for **GDW** (duh), would solicit ideas and assign books well in advance, so we could do things like advance advertising and distributor solicitation. Being in business was a learning experience for all of us for the first decade or so.

Now: **SJ Games** has a pretty formal process for deciding what titles to publish and when to publish them. The proposals still come from the same place—suggestions from the line manager, sales and marketing, and outside proposals. Ideas are placed on the wish list, unless they are assigned to a specific author immediately. Authors are required to submit an outline as part of the proposal process (although sometimes wish-list titles have rough outlines already created). We try to schedule releases well in advance, but Murphy's Law often intervenes, and changes to the release schedule are common.

Stage Two: Writing

Then: Some people have a relatively easy time of the writing side of things. I do not. I have covered the specifics in a previous editorial, so I won't repeat them here except to say that writing is a slow process for me, and that was as true 20 years ago as it is today. I normally began with an outline and went through several variations, revising and rearranging. Occasionally I work without an outline, but this is possible only when I have a very clear picture of what I want to achieve and how to get there. Other authors have different work habits (and I envy some of them).

The earliest **GDW** products were written on typewriters (let's just say they were better than doing it longhand and leave it at that). After a very short time, **GDW** acquired a type-setting machine with a mag-card memory, which required that products be retyped into it unless they had been written on it to begin with. Marc used to come into the office late at night or early in the morning to compose directly on the machine without interfering with the normal production use of it. The rest of us typed first drafts, revising and correcting by a literal cut-and-paste process (which also involved handwritten corrections and bottles of correction fluid), which were then retyped into the typesetter (with the attendant typos). In the fullness of time, **GDW** acquired computers and WP software of various kinds.

Now: Word-processing software has helped remove many of the most tedious aspects of writing. Revisions and corrections can be made seamlessly, spelling corrected on the fly, and turning a manuscript over to production is as simple as e-mailing/ftping a few files. Now, instead of staring at a blank sheet of paper in a typewriter waiting for inspiration to strike, I stare at a blank computer screen, ditto. And, human nature being the way it is, it is now possible for one person using a computer to make the same errors it used to take five or six people to make!

Stage Three: Production

Then: Once a book was finished, it was handed over to the production department to be proofread and typeset. The proofreading stage at **GDW** was often preceded by having one or more individuals read it over and comment; sometimes this was done by the internal proofreading staff, sometimes by outsiders. In any case, once a final manuscript was turned over, it would be converted to electronic form compatible with the typesetting machinery, proofread, and laid out.

The layout process was very complex in the days before desktop publishing. Text was printed in long strips and "pasted" into place on a stiff cardboard sheet called a layout board. Maps, headlines, titles, illustrations, and any special effects like borders or ruling were accommodated by leaving holes in the text and the detail added later by hand. Line drawings could be pasted down directly, but photographs and artwork with graduated gray tones had to be converted into a halftone (split into zillions of tiny little dots of various sizes). All of this was a lot of labor, so substantive changes after pasteup began were "discouraged" (which is a mild way of saying "nearly impossible"). There were many stages along the line where horrible mistakes could occur, mostly when one of the small pieces of paper fell off the board or shifted position. **GDW** eventually acquired the commercial equivalent of DTP software (and the enormous monitor to go with it, which could show two full-sized 8-1/2" x 11" pages on the screen at once) and life became easier.

Now: At **SJ Games**, proofreading is still done on a printed copy, for many reasons. Layout is now almost completely on computers; very rarely is anything actually pasted up. Illustrations, headlines, maps, rules, and such are added electronically. Changes are much easier to implement in electronic copies, but can still involve a great deal of work if they are substantive (although they are not as expensive to correct at this stage as they used to be).

Stage Four: Prepress

Then: Very little prepress work (preparing the book for printing) was done in-house at **GDW.** The offset-printing process used for most books required that the pages be photographed by a special camera, and the negative used to create a printing plate. Books are printed in signatures, which were at the time created by folding a huge sheet of paper several times. The pages cannot be printed on the sheet in numerical order, but have to be arranged so they are in the correct order and position after the sheet is folded and trimmed. This function, called stripping, was done by joining the page negatives in a specific pattern (or using a special machine to do so), and using them to make the printing plate. The plate is a thin sheet of metal coated with a substance that reacts to light by changing chemically and becoming insoluble in certain liquids. Using the negative, the plate is exposed to light and then developed like a photograph, except what happens is that a special solvent dissolves everything not fixed by the earlier exposure. Each sheet has one plate per color on each side, so the minimum is two plates per signature (obviously, four-color printing requires four plates per side, and sometimes more). Part of the printer's job was making sure the right plates were printed on the right sheets, in the proper order and in the proper orientation. It required organization and careful attention to detail, and there were zillions of places where errors could occur.

To cut down on possible errors, a proof of the negatives was made. This sample copy, called a "blueline" (for the rather obvious reason that they were printed blue on a pale yellow-white paper), was prepared by the printer and sent to the publisher before the plates were "burned." This was done to be sure that the prep had been done properly, and served as a final check of the product before it was actually printed (this was the last place where an error could be caught and fixed). Many, many very expensive mistakes were caught at the blueline stage (sadly, some things still slipped through). Color printing required color proofs, which were (and are) more expensive. All things considered, however, proofs were cheap insurance.

Now: Many large printing companies these days are shifting to a "direct-to-plate" process, where a printing plate is created from an electronic file. This is quicker than the old process, and does not involve the complicated preparatory work with negatives. The pages still have to be arranged on the plate, but this is done on the machine. And even the print-

ers still using negatives put the pages in place by machine and produce one large piece of film per side, rather than stripping individual pieces. Proofing negatives still uses bluelines (and color proofs for the covers), but a direct-to-plate process requires a digital proof. This is faster to produce than negatives and blueline, but there are still problems with seeing one thing on a proof and getting something different in the final product. In all, it tends to be a faster, smoother process these days—one which has cut down on the number of small problems a publisher is likely to see from the prepress part of the process. But the potential for really amusing mistakes still keeps print buyers awake at night.

Stage Five: Printing and Binding

Then: This is the part of the process least changed by time. The plate is wrapped around a giant roller on the printing press and, when the press is ready, the plate takes up a thin layer of ink from a second roller (the ink is specially formulated to stick only to the chemical coating, not to the metal itself). The press runs a sheet of paper under the plate/roller combination, and the ink is transferred to the paper. This process is called "offset lithography" or "offset" for short. Multiple-color presses use several plates (and several rollers) at once, each laying down a single color in a specific pattern. Most of the expenses of printing are fixed costs (the pressman can take an hour or more to get a press ready to print and to clean it afterward, but the actual printing may take less than a minute for fewer than 10,000 copies). The cost of paper and ink are insignificant percentages at the size of print runs we did. The more copies you print, the cheaper each copy is, up to a point.** Book covers (for softbacks) are printed in a similar manner on thicker paper stock, and sometimes get a coat of clear varnish to cut down on smears. Our covers tended to have more ink colors than the interiors, eventually using full-color printing (aka "four-color process," "4cp," or "process"). Offset presses tended to be about the size of a semi-trailer truck (sometimes a little smaller), and cost more than a good house in a really expensive part of town. The largest presses use huge rolls of paper, and print, fold, and cut the signatures roughly to size before kicking them out onto a pallet. They cost so much that printing companies hate to see them stand idle, so time on them is tightly scheduled (which is why missing a print date by a couple of days can sometimes delay a book for several weeks—you get bumped down to the next hole in the schedule).

An interesting feature of 4cp printing is that sometimes more than four colors are used. The standard four are cyan, yellow, magenta, and black; combined in various densities, these four inks can produce full-color pictures, with some limitations. Additional colors (like bright red) are sometimes printed in addition to the standard 4cp four; the best presses allow for this (sometimes being able to lay down six or eight different colors in one pass per sheet side).

After the ink dries (which depends on a number of factors too complex to go into), the sheets go to the area of the print shop called the bindery, where they are folded into signatures (15 to 20 years ago, that would generally mean 8-page units) and bound into books. Books are a lot cheaper if they are created in even signatures because binderies are set up to deal with that; anything out of the ordinary costs more. For a softback book (a "paperback") the cover is attached in one of several ways, and then the books are taken to a giant guillotine-like machine that trims the pages square and even (and can do serious damage to an inattentive operator). If the book is to be hardbound, the pages are bound together and trimmed before being put into the covers. The bindery is not a fixed cost—the more copies, the more the total cost.

Now: This is pretty much the same way things operate now. Ink chemistry has changed in various technical ways in the last couple of decades, the main one being more inks are

soy-based rather than petroleum products—less dangerous for all concerned. Presses have become slightly more compact, partly by the manufacturers catering to the more specialized markets (small presses for small jobs, big ones for complex jobs), but most now produce 16-page signatures rather than 8-pagers. Binding is pretty much the same as it was 25 years ago, with a bit more flexibility in capabilities added.

Recently, laser printers have begun to be used for what are called "print on demand" books. Some publishers are beginning to experiment with electronic formats, bypassing the printed book altogether. These technologies, and how they may or may not change the publishing industry, are really subjects for another editorial.

I won't discuss what happens to a book after it is printed—this is more sales and marketing than writing or production, and my experience with that end of the business is rudimentary. I have written, proofread, and edited books. I have typeset them, I have pasted them up, and I have even shot film of pasted-up pages. I've watched most of the printing process and have a real respect for the workmanship and attention to detail exhibited by the people involved. One of the few things I inherited from my father was the ability to enjoy a craftsman at work, and the printing trade is still as much art as science. That part of the job hasn't changed over the years.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Especially for you young whippersnappers who don't know why Liquid Paper was such an innovation.

** So why don't we print a million-zillion copies of every book so none of them ever go out of print? 1) It costs money to warehouse a book, and 2) companies get taxed on the value of unsold inventory, So the rule of thumb is never print more than a year or two's supply. This was true then, and holds true now. Why don't we go "print on demand?" Good question—no time for that now, however.

Dec 06, 2002, La Bell Curve Sans Merci

I've had this title floating around for a while, but I've never been able to think of anything to go with it. Then it occurred to me that my style of GMing has an unusual approach to dice and probability, and one of the "requests" from the discussion board was that I expound on my philosophy of GMing. So, here we go, in a rather roundabout way:

Designing RPGs doesn't take much in the way of sophisticated math (which is a good thing, otherwise I couldn't do it, being barely able to manage the basic four functions). A nodding acquaintance with simple percentage chances and how to add them together is pretty much all that is required, even for a science fiction game—except, of course, for the various design sequences, which I try to stay away from creating.

Marc preferred to stick with six-sided dice in **Traveller.** At the time the game was designed, polyhedral dice were harder to obtain than they are now, and Marc wanted to be able to use multiple dice, which is easier on the customers if they are commonly available. One side effect of this was that the original game design focused on sixes to a great degree: there were six careers, six major races, and so on. This meant that we used multiple six-siders where we needed larger numbers than 1-6. Back in high school I had worked out (in my own math-challenged way) the odds of various die rolls with two and three dice, for my first attempts at miniatures rules. Our school library had several books on statistics, but they did not deal with such simple things as dice and gambling—they did, however, deal with the notion of adding probabilities together ("OK, a 20% chance of something triggering a 30%

chance of something else . . . that's . . . uh . . . carry the 2 . . .) which I find useful from time to time (and have to look up each time I need it, because I can't seem to keep how it's done inside my brain for some reason—even when I write it down, I always lose it). Fortunately, others on the **GDW s**taff had a better command of math than I did.

Coming around to my GMing approach: my feeling is that most events in an RPG should be adjudicated by GM fiat, using dice as a guide, not the ultimate arbiter. I also believe GMs should be fair and impartial, within the limits necessary to provide a fun game for all concerned—I have no patience for GMs who act petty and vindictive. The main thing should be what makes an exciting time for all concerned. The GM should challenge the players, and the players should entertain the GM. One reason I was an unpopular GM was that I used to either roll the dice myself, or not tell the players what they needed to roll. Sometimes, I didn't even tell them what they were rolling for.

This allowed me to do several things:

I could adapt the results to suit the dramatic needs of the adventure without seeming arbitrary or capricious by blatantly ignoring die results.

I could prevent the game from becoming an exercise in die rolling.

I could roll dice without a reason, from time to time, as a means of building tension and to cover up when things were going on out of the PC's sight.

A minor disadvantage was that superstition among the players caused them to resent not knowing their target. There is a certain enjoyment from knowing you need to roll 4+ and then seeing it happen (or not, as the case may be), and a belief among many players that you can influence the die roll by positive mental attitude.*

The players also had to trust me, but all of them did. I grant this is not the case with all player/GM combinations. We were gaming for fun and relaxation and were not hyper-competitive or overly concerned with getting the most experience points possible.

That's a part of my particular approach to GMing. More on this same subject later.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

*I know people who have "lucky dice" and so on, and I marvel at the extent to which superstition remains in modern society—perhaps I shouldn't ... it seems to be part of our basic mental structure.

Dec 22, 2002, Aliens 2

Ordinarily, editorials that appear the day before Christmas have some kind of holiday theme. However, I've used up all my holiday themes (the **Traveller**-related ones anyway) for the time being, so instead, I'll deal with another request.

One of the responses to my recent "request for topics" on the **JTAS** discussion boards was a request for a look at how some of the official **Traveller** universe aliens came to be.

Before delving into the individual species, a short rundown of the creators (myself, Marc and Frank you already know):

Bill and Andrew Keith: Bill Keith had been a medic in the **US Navy** and had a keen interest in the biological sciences. Andrew was an avid SF reader, and had considerable imagination and a writing output I always envied.

John Harshman: John was also a voracious reader on numerous topics (SF included), and had a keen interest in the sciences. He went on to earn a doctorate in Zoology, which, as alien creating credentials go, is one of the better ones. He was also, with Marc Miller, the designer of Triplanetary.

John Astell: One of **GDW**'s generalized authors, JA (as we called him to avoid confusion with the first John) was interested in a wide variety of things (SF and games included), was highly creative, and a champion chess-player. He had a good sense for story and what made a good adventure. For most of his time at **GDW,** he was assigned to work with the Europa series games, but he sometimes sat in on other projects (we found the more minds involved in a project, the better the final product usually turned out).

Preliminaries

The aliens in Traveller were roughed in by Marc. Most of them came from an unpublished idea* for a very-large-scale SF game that was proposed before **Traveller** was published. The game would have depicted wars between several large interstellar empires. The map would have seemed very familiar to most of you, since it showed the human empire in the middle of the other five polities . . . anyway, after **Traveller** was published, Marc developed the notion of the major races and put together some notes describing them—he purposely left some of them rather sketchy. We worked on them in several stages, in fits and starts around other projects, some of them under development at the same time.

I won't talk much about the Droyne. I had little involvement in the development of the Droyne—Marc had the most notes on those, and had pretty much sketched them in as part of the Secret of the Ancients plot background.

Aslan

Bill and Andrew Keith lived in the Chicago suburbs when they first began to work for **GDW,** and (after a while) made the three-hour drive every few weeks for face-to-face discussions about various topics. They would stay for most of the day and we would go through several projects during a series of meetings. Often, we would have exchanged ideas through the mail or on the phone for days or weeks beforehand, so we were all primed for the work at hand.

The Aslan were developed over several months, with the final details thrashed out at one of the meetings. Marc had chosen the name, and the idea that the first explorers saw in them a fancied resemblance to the Terran lion. One of us (I forget who—I only know it wasn't me) suggested that the resemblance be more cultural than physical, so the notion of the male/female dichotomy came up (female lionesses do the bulk of the hunting, but the males do the intimidation and sleeping). Bill Keith and John Harshman worked out an anatomy, and the rest of us sketched in a society and overall culture.

I wrote the JTAS Contact based on the discussion, and Andy Keith later wrote the larger alien module, working from my article and the material developed at the conference.

The Aslan are probably the most popular of the alien species in the game, and I think it is because of the mixture of mundane and exotic features. Either that, or (despite my continuous assertions to the contrary) everybody thinks they are cats and likes them for that reason.

Vargr

Marc had a pretty good idea of what he wanted from the Vargr, and since their biology was predetermined, Bill had a lot to go on in the illustration of them. My contribution was limited to a few suggestions during development, and authoring the JTAS Contact on them.

The Vargr are among the least "alien" of the alien species in the game, and I think this has contributed to their popularity (they are either tied with the Aslan or running a close second).

K'kree

The K'kree were originally called "the Centaurs" in Marc's notes, and the "design committee" had no other restrictions on it. Bill Keith, John Harshman and I had several discussions of the K'kree, and these broke down into three basic areas: physiology, development, and psychology. To be "real" centaurs, they had to be hexapodal, and Bill and I worked out a "hand and foot" design that made biological sense. We took inspiration from the works of Konrad Lorenz and decided to make them highly intelligent and militantly herbivorous. The "herd over individual" social arrangement developed out of the previous developments, and a notion that it would help make the K'kree more alien.

The K'kree are unusual, and hard for people to sympathize with—and thus hard to roleplay. They were not very popular, and their's was the poorest seller of all the alien modules.

Hivers

In contrast to most of the other aliens, Marc had no preconceived notions about the Hivers. He specifically said he did not want the name to inspire creation of a "hive-mind insectoid" alien. His first notion for their appearance was that they should be avian, but his notes for the first design session were simply that they weren't to be a hive mind, and were to be "really alien." We decided to depart from almost everything we had done before and create a being with radial symmetry, only one sex, and a really, really strange approach to life in general. John Harshman came up with the life cycle and much of the society. Bill Keith was inspired to do a cross section right out of a comparative anatomy textbook. Since every part of the Hiver anatomy was demonstrably non-humanoid, Bill had to design new furniture and equipment for them.

Hivers don't have much direct contact with the Third Imperium, and I think this limits their popularity as player characters. Their culture fascinates a number of the fans, however, and the concept of manipulation is one that seems to have grabbed many imaginations (or collective paranoia). Of the assorted aliens I've worked on, I am most pleased with the Hivers, as they are truly alien and yet their moods and motivations are still at least mostly comprehensible to people.

SF games typically describe aliens in terms of the terrestrial animal type the most commonly resemble, hence the Aslan = feline, K'kree = bovine shorthand. When creating the aliens, we tried to not let preconceptions based on Earth animals color things—we tried to emphasize the differences between (for example) "mammal" (which is specific to earth) and "mammal-like" (which means they may share certain superficial features with terrestrial mammals). Too many people conclude that because the Aslan (or the K'kree for that matter) have some mammal-like features, that they have all the others as well.** Had we created a "reptile-like" major race, we would have similar problems with preconceived notions.

GDW stopped going into this level of detail with aliens after a while. The Keith brothers moved to Pennsylvania and conferences became tougher to arrange. The "major" aliens had been done, so there was less incentive to put great effort into the "minor" ones. Many of the lesser aliens were created piecemeal by throwaway lines in several publications or short essays in various library data. From time to time, we would collect these and create a **Contact!** essay for **JTAS**. Some aliens were the creation of one person, intended for **JTAS** or for a book in which they were to play a significant part (Bill and Andy Keith produced a number of these).

Working with the various alien lifeforms was one of the most enjoyable parts of the job. We seem to have done a good job overall.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Most of the creative types I am familiar with recycle unused ideas. This doesn't mean we hang on to every scrap we ever wrote (the opposite is true most of the time), but something good that isn't used goes back into the hopper and may emerge later in another project. I can't speak for other authors, but this is one reason why I usually decline requests that I "make available" unused ideas for past game projects—I don't give them away because I might be able to rearrange them and sell them elsewhere.

** The most annoying to me is the constant assumption among some fans that Aslan go wacko over catnip, that they purr when happy, etc., simply because they are "felinoid." Other SFRPGs seem to encourage this sort of thing, but the biology minor in me reacts as badly to this kind of thing as the average technogeek would react to "Every other action has an equal and opposite reaction."

2003

2003

Jan 05, 2003, Flotsam and Jetsam

Once again, I have decided to talk about a pair of totally unrelated topics. Well, partially related, I suppose—they both touch on SF, at least tangentially. Technically speaking, of course, neither is actually flotsam or jetsam (and there is a difference).

Ta-Ra-Ba-Re

One of the topics that came up recently was the question of overseas editions of **Traveller**, especially non-English language versions. Marc's* website gives the details of editions and such for those of you who want the details of the various translations or estimates of how many were printed.

Japanese: **Traveller** proved immensely popular in Japan. For a time, American RPGs were the only game in town, and science fiction was especially popular in Japan. For a time, we were told, **Traveller** in translation outsold every other RPG, including the one with the ampersand in its name. The translators got a number of copies (six, I think) of each product, which we invoiced them for. They got film negatives of the art, which we invoiced them for. They paid us royalties every quarter through a dollar account they had in a US Bank with a Tokyo branch. Essentially, we were importing money from Japan, and doing our part to make up for the balance of payments deficit!

Even though the translators got copies of the artwork, they seldom used it, and illustrated the books to Japanese tastes (lots of large-eyed child/women and giant anthropomorphic machines). We received samples of each book, and these ended up in Marc's possession when **GDW** closed. We also got large numbers of Japanese gaming and modeling magazines (produced by the same company), which were interesting and puzzling at the same time ("OK, what kind of a game needs a cover painting of a chick in a skimpy nightgown riding a heart-shaped barrage balloon over downtown Tokyo?" "Why are the space fighters attacking the giant nightclub singer?" "Why so many 1/24th scale models of pre-pubescent girls in sailor suits?"**). Rich Banner read Japanese slightly (a legacy of having been stationed over there for several years) and we discovered that Traveller is translated into Japanese as *Ta Ra Ba Re* (I can't reproduce the actual characters), but there were five symbols involved, and the second (Ra) and fourth (Re) were identical. Rich said the last symbol was a mark that modified the vowel sound of "Ra" into "Re" and thus rendered **Traveller** more or less phonetically.

Eventually, **GDW**'s dominance of the Japanese RPG market faded as domestic production became more suited to the local tastes.

German: I forget the firm that translated **Traveller** into German, but it was also a sizable enterprise, and many products were produced. I had taken two semesters of German in college, and (at the time) could read enough of the books to determine that the translation was pretty accurate (my ability with the language has since deteriorated to almost nothing). What I found most amusing was the translation of various science fiction and technical terms not found in my German dictionary, such as the German for "hovertank" and the like. We used the books as a source for terms in 2300 AD. The German publishers used their own illustrations for book covers, but used more of our interiors than the Japanese did. Bill Keith's vision of the game universe seemed more understandable to the Germans, it would appear. German-language publication ceased in the late 1980s, although I believe many of the titles are still available as collector's items.

Spanish: The Spanish translation was limited to the core rulebook, but since the 99 percent of my Spanish is highly offensive curses, I could not read it except on a very gross level.

I don't remember any other translations, but there might have been others. I have a vague memory that the Finnish group that translated **Twilight: 2000** expressed an interest in **Traveller** as well, but I am fairly sure nothing was ever published. **GDW** exported English-language versions to many countries and authorized local printings in the UK (which were not translations, merely adjustments to a different paper size—I don't believe they were changed to British spelling/grammar standards). Sauce for the Goose . . .

I touched on this in the footnotes to the last essay, but I thought it deserved a more complete discussion. Every once in a while, I find myself on the opposite side of the fandom fence. I've seen professional people in the presence of people they idolize, and they act just as fannish as the non-pros. The opening scenes of the movie **Galaxy Quest** depict an SF con, where hordes of fans descend on the former stars of a television series. I found this situation very familiar, but not in the same sense as most people—I have often been in situations like that, but on the receiving end more often than not. I have, of course, been a fan in my own right, and that leads me to another topic.

Circumstances often end a project before it can be completed. Projects are sometimes proposed, partly developed, and never see publication. From time to time, people ask me if I have any notes on Project X, or if I can at least tell them what the big unrevealed secret of Project Y was or if I have any unrevealed adventure seeds or campaign ideas. I understand the desire behind these requests, but I usually don't comply with them. Here's why:

I make my living from ideas. I have huge stack of partly developed ideas, notes for plots, bits of business, and so on. Good, usable ideas are, by their very nature, unique, and once used are difficult to recycle. If an idea doesn't get used, it can go back into the file and I can sell it later (emphasis intentional). If I put it on my website or send it to people or paint it on a billboard somewhere, I can't. It is not out of fear that someone else will use them (this is essentially the same reason screenwriters won't tell you their hottest movie ideas). It isn't because I like to torment the fans, or revel in the depth of my inside knowledge, or have signed a nondisclosure agreement. In my case, at least, it is insurance against the possibility that the flow of ideas may dry up someday, and a desire to keep an intact stockpile.

The reason I mention all of this is that I am, once again, in the position of fan: the **FOX Network** as canceled the really neat SF*** television series **Firefly.** It may or may not be picked up by another network, and if it fades completely from existence, it will leave a number of really interesting plot and background threads hanging. As a fan, I'd like for Joss Whedon to tell me what these were going to be. As a writer, I think I know why he probably won't—he might, but the decision is his, not mine or any other fan's.

So, there you have it—a New Years editorial that doesn't mention New Years (except this bit right here). I hope everyone didn't gain too much weight over the holidays, whichever ones you celebrate.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* I hope I don't have to explain who I'm talking about when I say "Marc"—if you don't know which Marc I'm talking about in this column, you must surrender all pretense of being a die-hard **Traveller** fan.

** We learned the answers eventually. Basically, you don't want to know (unless you already do).

*** I won't get into the debate of whether it is really science fiction or science fantasy or a science western—I think it is a very well-written, well-acted show with interesting characters, acceptable SFX, and a thought-provoking (or at least an attention-grabbing) uber-plot—which should be enough. And they are living on a spaceship after all.

Jan 19, 2003, Running Gags and In Jokes

For those unfamiliar with the terms, a "running gag" is something (hopefully something funny, but at least entertaining) that pops up again and again in slightly different circumstances (Like Dean Martin drinking or Jack Benny's miserliness). An "in-joke" is a bit of humor that is funny to people who are "in on" it. **Traveller** has been around a long time (we are in our 26th year) and has acquired its share of this sort of thing. People enjoy in jokes, partly because they can feel elevated above the normal crowd, and partly because it adds an additional level of entertainment to their already fun hobby.

I am not, by any means, acquainted with all of them, but here (for the benefit of those who may not be acquainted with them) are some of the more popular ones.

Names and Places: There are too many of these to go over in the small space available, as this is probably the most popular form of in joke in **Traveller.** I've dealt with a few of these before, if anyone is interested. **GDW** was not alone in this habit, all companies engage in it at some point or other (I remember an SPI game of the late 1970s which had two starships named Akroyd and Belushi). Some of the more amusing world names I had a part in were **Twylo** (taken from a **Dick Van Dyke Show** episode), **Remulak** (inspired from the assorted **Coneheads** routines on **Saturday Night Live**), and (last but not least), New Greenpernt (from the old **Rocky and Bullwinkle** animated cartoon series). Dozens more exist, created by GDW and by others over the years.

Popular Entertainments: What sort of movies, TV shows, stage plays, music, books, and sports will be common in the game/future? People have created all sorts of things over the years to answer this question, of which the most popular is the sport named grav ball, which has appeared in various incarnations in many places. This sort of thing is a wonderful way to add to the perceived realism of a game, since it gives the characters clues to their culture (as well as movies, TV shows, and sports teams to argue about). It remains undetermined whether **The Adventures of Whipsnade and Ramen** are genuine (to the extent that anything in a fictional universe can be genuine) or merely take place in movies in one or more **Traveller.** universes.

Hortalez et Cie: This megacorporation name is a different sort of in joke. The name is not really humorous, it is more of a historical reference or tribute.* *Hortalez et Cie,* for those who don't know, is the name of the "shell corporation" formed by Benjamin Franklin and others during the American Revolution to funnel money from French sympathizers into the American colonies before the French actually joined the conflict. When we (**GDW**) were brainstorming for megacorporation names, I suggested **HeC** because it struck a different note from the others and gave a wider range of linguistic groups to draw from (if I had the whole thing to do over again, I would include at least one Asian-name megacorporation . . . or maybe Polynesian). The name was fresh in my mind because I had recently been reading about Benjamin Franklin's diplomatic efforts on behalf of the Americans. Periodically, some undergrad fan takes a history course and runs across the name, and asks if there is any connection.

Historical and cultural in jokes can get quite sophisticated, even considering how well-read the fan-and author-base is. Sometimes, they can be used as clues (or red herrings) to important facets of an adventure situation.

Whipsnade and Ramen: Larsen E. Whipsnade** and Fred Ramen are a pair of characters created pretty much by accident on the **Traveller Mailing List** by various postings purporting to depict the adventures of this pair of perpetually peripatetic con-artists (beginning with the infamous "virtual barfight" episode last year), who (judging from the brief snippets of their chronicled adventures) seem to be a mixture of the **Three Stooges** and the

"Road" pictures of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby (with a pinch of W. C. Fields thrown in for good measure). Numerous little details are added from time to time, such as Whipsnade's predilection for straw boaters and dealing three-card monte.

Ditzie: Ditzie is another running gag over on the **TML,** whose origins are covered in Richard Hough's contribution to the discussion boards. Ditzie and Famille Spofulam have appeared in a couple of places here, including (but not limited to) Rob Prior's **Amber Zone Ye That Have Sown the Wind.** To quote Rob's description: "Ditzie is an incredibly cute moppet with dark brown hair and big brown eyes. She's amazingly bright and inquisitive, and has a flair for weapons design (especially the kind that make bright flashes)."To be technically correct, the illo of Ditzie accompanying that article should depict her in an "I [heart] HE" T-shirt, evidently Ditzie's preferred garment (of late). Ditzie and I have concluded a deal, by the way, wherein she agrees to confine her activities to the universe she presently occupies and I agree not to tell her about my **Traveller** character ever, ever again.

Astroburgers, Brubek's et al.: These are send-ups of the American habit of creating franchise chains for every conceivable commercial enterprise, translated to the Third Imperium. Some (but by no means all) Americans seem to find this amusing, in a comforting kind of way, while some (but by no means all) non-Americans are offended at the notion that the Third Imperium is merely 20th Century America writ large. A tiny minority work out the marketing plan for such institutions.

I have passed over many examples in this little discussion, and I am sure that a number have slipped my mind over the years.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Some movie directors like to include little snippets reminiscent of other films—tributes—in other (often totally unrelated) films. As an example, watch the climactic scenes of **The Bridges at Toko-Ri** and **The Dambusters** some time and you will notice some bits used in Star Wars. If memory serves, this is one of the hallmarks of a graduate of the UCLA film school.

** "Larson E." is a typical name for W. C. Fields-like characters . . . "Larsen E." is a pun for "larceny" you see . . . not unlike the name "Mahatma Kane Jeeves" (exploration of which is left as an exercise for the reader).

Feb 16, 2003, Earth in Crisis

I don't want to unduly alarm anyone, but on August 27th 2003, Mars will make its closest approach to the Earth in thousands of years and our fragile blue planet will be ripe for invasion by the little green guys. This will be closer even than the Angry Red Planet came to us in August of 1924 (and those of us whose memories haven't been wiped will remember what a mess that was).

The time to prepare is now! Will we be taken unawares, or will we be waiting in the tall grass for the unspeakable horrors when they arrive?

So, you're saying to yourself, what can I, a loyal inhabitant of planet Earth, do to help out? We all know* how vulnerable the Martians are to our Terrestrial bacteria—the first line of our defense will be microscopic. The first step is to see to it that every house on the planet is a veritable arsenal of microbes. Cease immediately all cleaning, scrubbing, and disinfecting—let mold and mildew coat every surface in your house. Every germ you kill now could have bred a bazillion little soldiers for the defense of our home, this island Earth.

As the date of the invasion grows closer, more active measures will be needed. Begin-

ning in July, allow your garbage to pile up on your lawn. Strew raw chicken parts in every room of your house, rub your walls, floors, ceilings, and all exposed surfaces with grated blue cheese. Pour milk onto the carpet. Stockpile rotting eggs in every room for use as grenades. Don't wash anything! Leave your hair unshampooed, your socks unlaundered, your hands unwashed—let your fingernails accumulate grime, the better to infect a Martian when you claw at the inside of their gullet as he swallows you whole (Martians, not having teeth, merely gum their victims briefly before sucking them down).

On D minus 10 or so, try to catch something that's going around (this should not be a problem if you have prepared properly). Go out with a wet head. Get inadequate rest. Set the air conditioning as low as it will go, drench yourself, and give yourself a cold. Remember a cough or a sneeze at the right time can kill dozens, even hundreds of the horrors from beyond the stratosphere. Fill a squirt gun with the fluid that leaks out of the refrigerator you turned off last month and give it to the little green guys right between the eyes (assuming they have more than one). Remember that the human mouth is a cesspool of bacteria under the best of conditions—use it often and well.

If you can arrange to throw up on their leader while he's "questioning" you, so much the better. Failing that, spit in their "eye" (assuming they have less than two) and claw them with the fingernails you have left untrimmed and uncleaned for weeks.

And now for some really repulsive news: we have be given incontrovertible proof that certain unscrupulous, treasonous quislings have been stockpiling antibiotics for sale to the invading armada. Whether this is in the hope of profiting from the fall of humanity or an attempt to curry favor with the octopoid invaders, we cannot say—whatever their motives, these treasonous slime are beneath contempt.

Naturally, you will need to keep an eye peeled for signs of such nefarious treason: you can use cleanliness as a shibboleth** —anyone not willing to become a disease-carrying plague rat can safely be denounced as a traitors to their planet, and treated accordingly.

One thing that can certainly be counted on—the inhabitants of Earth will not be defeated—our ultimate victory is assured, provided we do not deviate from the one true path. We will not go gentle into that good night.

Now, if I can just sneak this past Loren and get it loaded onto the **JTAS** website under his signature, the Earth will be saved and we Venusians can continue in our covert takeover of . . .

Uh-oh. What I'm thinking is still going into the machine . . . Zuhl take these primitive Earther computer interfaces! Ummm . . . People of Earth! Ignore the paragraph above. This is Loren Wiseman, **Traveller** guru, writing this. It is most emphatically not Zubiir, High General of Zontar, Grand Emperor and Ruler Plenipotentiary of Venus. Hear and obey!

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

*Well, any of us who have read H.G. Wells.
** Look it up!

Mar 02, 2003, A Rose, by Any Other Name

. . . would be called something else.

Character names can be an important facet of the overall gaming experience. A character named "Lance Starkiller" conjures up a much different mental image than one named "Twinkle-toes" Lannigan.* Names can help set a mood, give important plot clues, strew red herrings, and generally add to the perceived realism of the game. I will leave starship names

for another time—they are a topic all their own.

The characters I create for games are sometimes named with historical or cultural references in mind. My character in the first **Traveller** playtests was named Henson Stringfellow, named after two early British aviation enthusiasts, William S. Henson and John Stringfellow (they were mentioned in the movie **Flight of the Phoenix** and the names stuck with me for some reason. Other names I've picked for characters include Michael Belker (named for the character of the same name from the TV series **Hill Street Blues)** and Dempsey (named for pugilist Jack Dempsey). I took a page from an episode of **Dr. Who** and created a pair of intelligence-gathering specialists named Persuasion (a large, menacing knee-buster type) and Enlightenment (a small, good-looking woman who specialized in subtle psyops). Other characters have been named without regard for references or in jokes, although I acknowledge a slight bias for European names in my own characters.

In making up names for inclusion in **Traveller** books, I like to try to get a wide variety of linguistic groups for Solomani names (see p. GT:63). Many of the original authors tried to mix ethnic backgrounds when possible—Stashu Nagoya is the example I usually give (mixing Polish and Japanese), but the books are full of other examples. Of course, it is perfectly permissible to mix Vilani and Solomani names for most milieux.

For alien and Human minor races in **Traveller,** there are the numerous random word generation tables published in various books (and the automated on-line versions available on just about every major **Traveller** website). A list of common (well . . . we say they are common) Vilani names is given on p. GT:77.

Recently, I have found another internet source of non-European ethnic names: spam! The so-called "Nigerian" or "419" scams that have been overloading my in-box for years can be mined for Nigerian (and now other nationalities) names that can be mixed and matched with other nationalities. Another good source for names are the websites maintained by various nations for purposes of attracting tourists or to provide information—these sites often contain lists of government officials and other names, which can be freely lifted, reshuffled, and installed in a game. Another advantage of these sites is that they are often available in English, French, German, and other languages as well as the native language, and are designed to be read by the widest possibly range of people.

A web search through http://www.google.com (my favorite search engine) will reveal a number of sites devoted to names and their meanings, and any decent library will have books on the subject. Genealogy books and sites often give derivations of family names. More extensive research will reveal websites like the **Utah Baby Namer** (featuring a fairly large number of less-common but authentic names used by some American Mormons).

Of course, some names can be created by that simple scientific process called "Making Things Up." One method is to glue one or more words together—Starkiller, Sandwalker, and so on. Another is to select a group of syllables that sound cool (a highly subjective method, so I won't give any samples).

Nicknames are a separate matter—people don't always get to pick their nicknames, and sometimes don't particularly like them. I had one character (a large, powerfully-built mercenary soldier) nicknamed "Moon"—short for "Moon Unit" (a continual source of harassment for him, because everyone knows Moon Unit is a girl's name). As a GM, assigning a nickname to a character is one way of influencing the game, as it can indicate how the rest of the group views the character. It can also serve to let the player know how his character is perceived by those around him. Nicknames like "Old Yellowstain" indicate a certain lack of respect, for example, whereas calling someone "The Hawk" indicates something completely different.

One side effect of studying names for RPGs is that it gives you a better appreciation of the differences in societies throughout the world. This will make you a better GM, a better

player, and a better person.

>	Loren Wiseman
>	Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* I once created an NPC with criminal leanings I named Eddie "Two Thumbs" Arturo. His introduction into the scenario went something like this:

>	Player: What's his name?
>	Me: Eddie "Two Thumbs" Arturo
>	Player: Why do they call him "Two Thumbs?"
>	Me: Because he has two thumbs.
>	Player: Doesn't everybody have two thumbs?
>	Me: They aren't his.
>	Player: Oh . . .

Mar 17, 2003, World and Star Names

Still saving spaceship naming practices for a later essay, this time I thought I'd go into my prejudices towards naming stars, planets, and other assorted chunks of rock (including, but not limited to interesting geographic* features). In a game universe with 11,000 worlds, you rapidly run into naming problems. I've discussed the origins of some of them (at least some of the ones in the **Solomani Rim**) in a previous editorial (and another, as it happens), and I won't repeat them here . . . much.

I once read that Captain James Cook discovered so many islands in the Pacific during his voyages that he took to naming them by using entries from the famous dictionary of Dr. Samuel Johnson—although many of the names he assigned were later changed, there still remain Ocean, Placid, and Pleasant Islands, named alphabetically. **GDW** never had to resort to anything this blatant.

In my private game universe (which never really got off the ground -only a few adventures ever took place there), I created a sector and named all the stars. This was about the time **Book 6: Scouts** was being written, and I used the preliminary system generation sequence to create several subsectors worth of systems in greater detail. I had named the worlds in a rather eclectic fashion, and found that I had a collection of place names, historical personages, and assorted other bits and pieces. I decided to try to name the worlds and worldlets of a star system after things associated with that star. For example:

The star I had named **Roma** had 12 planets orbiting it, so it was easy to decide on an overall naming scheme . . . the twelve Roman Emperors covered in Suetonius' **Lives of the Caesars.** I started with the innermost world, and named it Julius, then proceeded outward (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian). Each world had moons, and for those I took the names from wives, children, or others associated with that particular emperor. Caligula, for example, had one moon, which I named Incitatus (after Caligula's horse/consul), although this was not the only option. Claudius (the only inhabited world in the system) had two moons, which I could have named after Claudius' two wives: Messalina (famous for . . . well, er . . . look her up) and Agrippina. I needed Agrippina, however, for the one moon of Nero (she was his mother), so instead, I chose to name the second moon after Claudius' son Britannicus (who predeceased Claudius). I had real problems with Otho and Vitellius -they were gas giants and had many moons each, but each ruled less than a year and didn't have much in the way of associates (at least, not in the references I had readily available then), so I winged it. As it turned out, all of my work was in vain -the campaign ended before any adventurers could

go there. Such is life. Had I ever needed to create cities or continents for Claudius, I would have continued in the same vein, and used names with a Roman theme. I had worlds named after linguistic groups in Southeast Asia, characters from War and Peace, cities and counties in Illinois, historical personages, and several others.

"Silly" names are common in science fiction (Larry Niven's "**Mount Lookithat**" is one of the better known examples). Coalinga, California grew up around the **Southern Pacific Railroad's Coaling Station A** -"Coaling A" became "Coalinga." Several cities in my home state of Illinois were founded as a result of coal mining operations, of which "**Carbondale**" and "Coal City" spring to mind. Others were company towns named after the owner of a coal company. Real estate developers often name streets after their children (hence subdivisions often have names like Maryellen Drive or Bryan Lane).

I never named a world after a song. The reason is that my musical tastes lean towards pieces that don't make especially good world names** (**Canon in D**, **Lt. Kije Suite,** etc.).

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Yes, I know, referring to hills, mountains, and the like on other planets as "geographic" features is incorrect, but I don't really like words like "astrographic" or "planetologic" . . . they all seem clumsy and contrived to me.
** *Claire de Lune* might work, however.

Apr 13, 2003, Starship Names

In **Traveller**, players name their own starships, and GMs name starships that the adventurers encounter. I'll confess, as an official **Traveller** writer, I never named a very large number of starships. Without going through my copious notes,* the first one that leaps to mind is a luxury passenger liner I named *Cote D'Azure*, (from the double adventure **Marooned/Marooned Alone**). I named one fighter class *Fer de Lance* and another **Butcher-Bird**. I once named a free trader **Mary Celeste** as a subtle hint that the group probably didn't want to hire passage on it (I wanted them to stay put a little longer). It worked. GMs can use names to help steer players along a given adventure path. Ship names are also great for puns, in-jokes, and simply expressing GM/player creativity.

There are several theories of applying names to starships.

There is a huge group of people who name starships after songs, but I've never followed this practice, as the music I like best makes very poor ship names -at least it would make rather odd ones: I.M.S. Pachelbel's **Canon in D** . . . **I.N.S. Second Brandenburg** (a merchant ship named *Handelschiffe* would be a bilingual pun, however, and not out of place).

I chose *Cote D'Azure* because it brought images of indolence and luxury cruises to my mind. *Fer de Lance* ("lancehead") is a species of poisonous snake (Bothrops atrox, one of the viper family), and a good choice for a fighter, I think. My only other fighters were for TNE, and were intended to be tributes to the WWII USN fighters of the "Cat" series: **Wildbat** (**F4F "Wildcat"**), **Hellbat** (**F6F "Hellcat"**), and **Bearbat** (**F8F "Bearcat"**), etc. Dave Nilsen and I joked about other craft in the series: **Fruitbat** (a tanker variant), **Dingbat** (an **ECM "Wild Weasel"** variant), **Brickbat** (an attack bomber variant) and so on, but of these only the **Wildbat** was ever written up. We never decided on anything we could use **Wombat** for -probably just as well.

I'm a follower of the "family names" theory of naming ships -military ones at any rate. All the ships in a particular class should be named after the same kind of person, place, or thing (which can lead to some serious stretches when your class is something like "1,250

ships named after Welsh musical instruments"). There is less trouble for small craft like fighters and the like: they don't tend to have individual names, just numbers (under my scheme, anyway). One method is to create a list of words and combine them in odd ways (As **GDW** did for **Azhanti High Lightning**). Sometimes you can mix in nonsense words (or random words generated using one of the alien language tables) and apply meanings to them later. The well-known Annic Nova was named because the serial numbers (in an unknown language) painted on its side happened to resemble the Galanglic letters A-N-N-I-C N-O-V-A.

Non-military ships have fewer restrictions in naming, in my opinion. Free traders should be pretty much open to anything, for example: **Ramblin' Rex, Headbangers' Ball, Filthy Lucre, Edmund Fitzgerald II**, and so on ad infinitum -whatever suits the owners and operators. For a group of adventurers, the choice is up to them (although I would allow the GM a veto).

If I were running a campaign, I would create a file of starship names for use in the event the group wants to know more about a ship they bump into in a random encounter. People with more free time than I have could even assemble a list of starships of each type, complete with crews, cargoes, and so on, generic enough to encounter anywhere. In campaigns where the group stays among a group of star systems for a while, working the same trade routes, I'd consider it worthwhile to create several "regulars" that the group would run into again and again, with crews that stay reasonably stable, and cargoes that make sense on a given route. If the adventurers are merchants, the competition will help keep them on their toes.

However, not every starship name has to be a pun, a cool song title, a movie/literary reference or an in joke. They don't even need to be heroic or inspirational, or even just sound good (not that any or all of these aren't perfectly good). They need to work: **Purple Haze** works. **Lucky Credit** works. **Wet Blob** doesn't (and frankly **Loathsome Reverie** doesn't work for me either, but it's too late to change that now).

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* OK, I confess I don't have "copious notes" on the starships I have named ... but it sounds a lot better than "After wracking my brain trying to remember ... " and gives me an excuse to have a footnote**

**As you may have noticed, I like footnotes, and am still working on a good way to do an entire editorial in them.

Apr 27, 2003, Alternatives

A recent hot item on the discussion boards here is the subject of alternatives to the "standard" (Ancients, three imperia, open eggs from the big end*) milieu. Practically every **Traveller** GM runs a universe that differs in one or more particulars from everyone else's, but the discussions here were for more substantive departures.

Most of these seemed to center around the Ancients -either eliminating them entirely or modifying them and their actions considerably. This ties in with a subject I've talked about here before.

I dropped a few quick ideas on the discussion board to jumpstart discussion, and many others hopped in with ideas of their own. I thought I'd expand on one of my notions and toss out a couple of others.

My first notion expands on a idea first covered in Andre Norton's novel **Star Guard**

(with other inspiration taken from Poul Anderson's **The High Crusade**, Gordon R. Dickson's **Dorsai Series**, and Pournelle's **Janissaries Series**) the notion that Terrans can travel in space only as mercenaries in the pay of more advanced worlds. Some distant, extremely powerful interstellar government has decided this is the best way to make use of the "natural aggression" of the Terrans, and the Terrans are starting to get sick of it and beginning to plot rebellion. Some would reject this as too much of an "Earthman's Burden" type background, others as too military-oriented. Nevertheless, I find some personal attraction to this one, primarily because I am a wargamer at heart, but also because I liked the Andre Norton books (**Star Guard** was part of a series) that inspired it. All you need is a large, oppressive interstellar organization (like the **Vilani Ziru Sirka**), a large quantity of war-torn worlds, and a secret organization of Terrans determined to win their "proper place in the scheme of things" (I suspect that, to some, this identifies me as a hopelessly backward, "70s" SF fan -so be it).

Another variant on an older SF theme is that there is no gigantic interstellar empire -only a kind of loose mercantile confederation like the Hanseatic League or a customs union like the 19th century German Zollverein. There are a lot of small multi-system states, and a lot of independent stars, but there is no Imperium. Piracy is regulated by individual states (and the occasionally coalition to wipe out a nest that's interfering with trade), and the "universe" is small enough that a criminal group will soon run out of places to hide. This setting also has a "*Golden Age*" feel to it, harking back to any number of stories from the 1940s onward, and is perfect for the "small starships and few of them" crowd.

My last notion is more radical departure from history: what if another species of genus Homo served as the basis for the Ancients' manipulations? If the Ancients took H. erectus instead of H. sapiens, the expanding Terrans would encounter an interstellar empire peopled by a different species of human, one with a slightly different appearance and (presumably) incapable of interbreeding. Once the truth were discovered, there would still be a "Terran superiority" movement, but what form it would take is a matter for speculation.

I hope these speculations have proven enlightening.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* OK, that last bit was a joke -eggs can be opened at either end (or both) in the official Traveller universe.

** We didn't want to have humanity brought to Earth from elsewhere . . . Marc and the rest of us at **GDW** felt that the evidence that humanity developed on Earth is overwhelming.

May 12, 2003, The Road Less Traveled

To a certain degree, the writers and publishers of **Traveller** "set the stage" for fan campaigns. There is a tendency for campaigns to follow what is published for the game. I thought it would be interesting to contemplate how these things came to be.

The first published adventures followed the sort of things we (the staff at **GDW**) were interested in, which colored what we did in the first playtest sessions, and what we wrote about later. The first playtests featured a collection of former military types who had managed to link up with the owner of a ramshackle merchant ship (the name long since faded from my memory*) and just happened to meet his crew needs. There was no long-term background setting -Marc and Frank took turns acting as GM, and the details of the worlds we visited changed from session to session. On every world, we encountered some person

who knew one or more of our group, and who just happened to have a special problem only people with our particular talents could solve. Thus came the standards for early **Traveller** adventures: job searches in the starport bar, people approaching with a job offer that involved shady activities, "ethically challenged merchants," and all the rest.

A **Traveller** fan would be very familiar with those early adventures, because they served as the prototypes for the vast majority of campaigns -a "tramp steamer" wandering where cargoes took us, sometimes taking on odd jobs to scrape together enough cash to keep things running when cargoes were hard to find. John Harshman and I took a short stint as hunting guides, for example, and there was a short-lived plot involving a hunt for a local psi institute. The group at **GDW** were wargamers and military historians, and this colored our escapades.

Naturally, the first adventures for **Traveller** tended to be the same sorts of things. Since these were what we published first, these became the standard adventure types, and the fans demanded more. The future builds upon the past, and people usually do what they know how to do, so we wrote what people said they wanted, and diverged from the mainstream only from time to time. When we began fleshing out what was to become the "official universe," we set things up to promote the kinds of things we had already done, and which we were most interested in.

We expanded later on, of course. We tried adventures involving "whodunits," diplomatic missions, mercenaries, mysteries, spies, private eyes. Writing these, however, took more time and effort than the "standard" adventures, so they appeared later in the product stream, by which time the fans had settled on a few campaign types, largely drawn from our prototypes and assorted literary and film inspirations. **Star Wars** was clearly an early influence for many. Indeed, long-term readers will remember my previous discussions on how we had originally intended for the Ine Givar to be the "plucky rebels resisting a monolithic and oppressive empire," but the more we worked with the background, the more the Imperium became the good guys. I take partial credit/blame for this -my enthusiasm for the Roman Empire leaked over into the game.**

Some themes came about that were not of our creation, however. We never dreamed that people would enjoy creating and running mercantile corporations, although the way the rules were written encouraged this sort of thing. I have always been surprised to the extent to which the fans want to play high level officials, military commanders, and movers and shakers (I should have foreseen it, however, when one of the playtesters wanted to start out as "boss of my own complete planet").

In the final analysis, the most popular types of adventures have come to be those which GMs can most easily create. Merchant campaigns are easy, but coming up with a new (and interesting) crime to solve each session can place certain strains on a GM. Which is why there are so few campaigns where the adventurers are part of a crime-solving interstellar rock band.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

*Alas, not the **Beowulf,** as that ship was not named (or sketched out) until later in the history of the game.

**The big shift came when Frank wrote up a list of emperors, drawing heavily on my knowledge of Roman and Byzantine emperors. The characters began to involve us, and as we created biographies for the current ruler and his family, we began to change our approach. Very little of the old "bad empire" made it into print.

May 26, 2003, Eight Tracks on My Mind

It is an article of faith among **Traveller** fans and other technogeeks that technological goodies will continue to get smaller and cheaper. Cellular (aka wireless) phones are a good example. One of my nephews used to work for the **Illinois Secretary of State**, and as a perk of his job got one of the earliest cellular phones. Compared to current models it was enormous, and was heavily dependent on his car for power. I have no idea what it cost, but it was doubtless very expensive. Over the weekend, on a cross-country bus ride, I noticed that cell phones were common among the passengers* and that they continue to shrink. They have become so small, in fact, that I noticed that several people were having trouble using them—many phones are so short that their users cannot hold them to the ear and the mouth at the same time, and had to constantly shift back and forth. Cell phones have become so cheap that "disposable" models are available. More to the point, they have become cheap enough for me to consider buying one. The cheap ones are not on the cutting edge—if you want to take pictures with your cell phone (or navigate the South Pacific), for example, you still need to part with more money than I care to spend . . .

Digital cameras are undergoing the same process. Michelle Barrett (who runs **Warehouse 23**) recently discovered one that is small enough to fit in my shirt pocket for less than $50.00. It's not top of the line, but it will do what I need it to do (my needs are simple—my camera needs, anyway).

Which brings me to something I have noticed as a general trend: about the same time something becomes cheap enough I am willing to consider buying it, a new toy comes along that costs more than I make in a year. This was (and remains) true of computers. Newer, faster chips, larger memories, more features—every year I get farther and farther behind.

The thing is, this is nothing new. This same thing has been going on for more than a century now. Automobile manufacturers invented the notion that new is better, and one of the salient features of American life from the 1940s on has been "keeping up with the Joneses"—meaning engaging in a perpetual competition with friends and neighbors to accumulate the most cool possessions. "Whoever dies with the most toys, wins" as the saying goes. This is a salient feature of American culture, and it could be argued that trying to represent this in **Traveller** would simply be one more example of the "*Yanks in Space*" syndrome, reviled by many fans (and embraced by a few).

I won't go into the economic effects, but few people other than multibillionaires can afford to get every new gadget the instant it comes out. Car fanatics buy a new car every year, but pretty much limit themselves to cars. Computer fanatics could buy two or three new machines a year (and some do), but most limit their acquisitive tendencies. Suppose, however, that the government of a world and the manufacturers conspired (though planned obsolescence and taxation policies, for example) to encourage wildfire consumer spending as a means of keeping an economy pumped. No small number of science fiction novels were written dealing with this sort of dystopia. I wouldn't suggest it for the Imperium as a whole, but as a situation for an individual world, it could create some amusing situations.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* What convinced me that the price had come down radically was my observation that even the passengers whose choice of luggage was a plastic trash bag had cell phones.

Jun 08, 2003, Making Things

This has only the most tenuous connection with **Traveller**, but no true **Traveller** fan ever let that stop them, so here goes.

Many of you know that my hobby is not RPGs, but lead-pushing.* Before I got into that, I was a modeler—I built model kits, small dioramas, and the like. Most boys build models for a time—it seems to be part of the male culture in America**—but few carry the habit into adulthood. Many of those that do tend to dive in headlong, researching historical prototypes, paint schemes, variants, and (sometimes) buying hundreds of dollars worth of "superdetail" aftermarket parts sets for a $50.00 kit. I am not one of these folks (who are amply documented in magazines such as Fine Scale Modeler) but I have a similar devotion (or mental defect, as you will)—a couple, actually, which overlap to a degree. Among the kits I built were every Pyro plastic model gun I could lay my hands on (flintlocks, wheel-locks, Colt cap and ball revolvers, and so on—sadly these are long gone).

As a miniature wargamer, I accumulate and paint miniature soldiers and equipment. But I also build terrain for the battles to take place on, and this can get rather involved. Sadly, much of my earlier work was either donated to wargamers in Illinois or did not make the trip to Texas intact when I took my current position at **SJ Games**. I do have an enormous amount of Geo-Hex (which is no longer being manufactured, although this may change in a year or two) in Austin, which I use as the basis for my game terrain (or would, if I had not been forced to abandon my gaming table in Illinois). My miniatures and terrain building efforts are (or soon will be) chronicled on my website. Those interested in creating your own model buildings should make every effort to acquire a copy of Ian Weekley's **Buildings for the Military Modeler**, and to do an online search for the many good terrain and structure building sites (start with **Hirst Arts** and **The Miniatures Page**, and the myriad excellent resources available to the railroad modeler (too many to provide URLs for). If you are on a budget, do a web search for "cardstock buildings" or go to here and do a little investigative surfing.

I am slowly recreating my collection of wargames buildings and terrain features, especially as I learn new techniques, or discover new products. For example, I have had "Roman Temple" on my "to build" list for years, but always put it off because doing columns was a pain, and I didn't want to fool around making molds for a one-off project. My discovery of the **Castlemolds Roman Temple** mold made this project feasible—Hirst Arts has done the hard part already. Another long term project was inspired by the Sulieman deck plans, which has inspired me to build a 25mm scout ship (for skirmish-type wargames, of course). Perhaps I will one day be able to dock it at Tom Harris' 25mm space station. Other projects include a 25mm ship's boat, modular cutter, and launch (these will almost certainly require a vacuum-forming machine, of which more below).

A second enthusiasm of mine I can only describe as a desire to make stuff—although the "stuff" tends to be weapons (although there are exceptions). In a way, this is simply the creation of 1:1 scale models, although the technical term for a 1:1 scale model is "replica." Over the years, I toyed with the notion of historical recreation, and began putting together a couple of military costumes with this in mind (I still have some bits of a medieval cross-bowman's kit, and assorted pieces from the American Civil War and ancient world). For my most recent foray into the field, I have created a set of replicas of the **Lewis Chessmen** (I couldn't afford the **British Museum**'s prices for their set of replicas). Lingering in the back of my mind, however, are other projects. I am not a metalworker, so creating historical armor is out of the question for me (I buy mine from others). But the notion of building

full-scale replicas of **Traveller** weapons and equipment appeals to me. There are people who do this sort of thing to create accessories for science fiction convention costume shows. I'm not a costumer, and have no desire to wear this stuff. For me, the reward is in the creation (the struggle is the glory) and only sometimes in selling the stuff afterwards (I've sold two chess sets on **E-Bay** and am working on a third).

It is interesting how much crossover there is between the two passions of mine. My experiments in making my own gaming miniatures over the years has given me a nodding acquaintance with the techniques of white metal and resin mold making and casting (I still have much to learn), which came in handy when I wanted to cast the chessmen replicas. In turn, this has led me to research theatrical prop making techniques, which are very similar to the methods used to create models from vacuum-formed plastic and miniature wargaming equipment. Many of the same techniques are used in model railroading, architectural modeling, doll and dollhouse making, and other fields.

I am not alone in this, of course. **Traveller** artist Jesse DeGraff has enthusiasms similar to my own, and has plans that rival or exceed mine: he wants to create a complete set of **Imperial Marine** battle dress (among other things—no point in doing the battle dress if you don't have a gauss rifle or FGMP, for example), for which he will require (and is building, if he hasn't finished it already) a professional size vacuum-forming machine. I am envious . . . such a machine could turn out the shell of a 25mm 40-ton shuttle with ease. Several times.

I could build such a machine except for one thing: I don't trust my ability to do the electronic wiring necessary to install the heating elements. Sigh.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* A.K.A. miniature wargaming.
** One of my elementary school classmates used to built his kits with firecrackers included, to facilitate the "blow 'em up after you get tired of 'em" aspect of juvenile model-building.

Jun 23, 2003, Plotting

I've been puttering around with the notion of a **Traveller** television series since about seven minutes after Marc outlined the game to me. Over the years, I have seen many SF television series come and go. Some of them were very good, some of them were very bad, and almost all of them had some aspect that was kind of neat (even the worst of them). There are several problems associated with bringing a science fiction series to television—I plan on discussing a couple of them.

First, overall format: For several reasons (some of them good ones), many series have the same overall format—a starship and its crew traveling through the universe. The original **Star Trek** set the standard here, focusing on the command staff of a quasi-military exploration ship.

The advantages to this setup are numerous. You have a standard cast that can be augmented by guest stars from time to time. You can re-use the same basic sets for much of the action, since the ship is the same from week to week. Since the ship travels to different worlds, you can arrange pretty much any sort of encounter the plot of a given episode needs. The crew can leave the ship as necessary to interact with a local world, or the plot can take place entirely within the confines of the ship. If the ship is a large one, you can have guest stars or semi-regulars without the need to justify where they are between episodes. One of the people associated with the original **Star Trek** likened the series to the TV western

Wagon Train (which had a string of wagons instead of a starship, and assorted western back- lots instead of planets, but was otherwise the same thing).

The main drawback to this is that following the adventures of the starship **Enterprise/ Galactica/Red Dwarf/Voyager/Andromeda/Serenity** and her crew is beginning to seem a little trite. Good writing and a good uberplot (see below) can make up for a lot and bring freshness to the "ship-and-crew, Wagon-Train-to-the-stars" schtick. **Blake's 7** and **Doctor Who** departed from the formula to the extent of changing the basic cast from time to time.

A less common approach is to continue the focus on a small group of regulars, but to substitute a stationary space station for the starship—which could be called the **Grand Hotel** approach (after the movie of the same name). Two examples of this approach are **Deep Space 9** and **Babylon 5**. The focus is on the people who run the station, and the universe comes to them rather than vice-versa. The series **Stargate: SG-1** focuses on the adventures of a basic cast with semi-regulars and occasional guests (and, it could be said, uses the stargates themselves as surrogate starships/stations). Other SF series have limited the scope more, but continued to focus on a standard cast (**Star Cops**), and a few have abandoned the standard cast and interconnected episodes entirely (T**he Twilight Zone** and **The Outer Limits**).

Something more recent in television SF is what I call the uberplot—an overall direction for the series, something that connects all (or at least most of) the episodes and is gradually revealed to the viewers (**Babylon 5**) is one of the better examples, but by no means the only one.

Traveller has an enormous amount of background material that could be incorporated into a television series. It seems like almost a no-brainer to set a **Traveller** series on an interstellar "tramp starship" and focus on the adventures of the crew and passengers. It is incredibly hard to resist, but I'm trying to think of something a little less trite.*

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* I have some ideas—but I'm going to keep those to myself for the time being.

Jul 07, 2003, A Few Confessions

I recently received a request to fill out a lengthy interview form concerning my SF reading habits, and many of the questions received some rather surprising answers. These will come as no surprise to the longer standing **Traveller** fans, but there are no doubt many readers out there who don't know one or more of them. I have discussed one or two of these in more detail in other editorials, so I won't go into them in detail, but I think it is useful to outline my own prejudices from time to time, so people know what axes I have to grind.

1) I am not as computer literate as most fans seem to be. I know enough about them to sell them (which I did for a while after **GDW** closed), and I can use them to some degree, but I require advice on the finer details of their operation. I maintain my own web site and I maintain one for a friend, but both of these are very simple and do not try anything complex. From time to time, I ask for help from **Traveller** fans and have been very satisfied with their assistance. My approach to computers is a simple one: as long as they do what I need them to (primarily word processing, with the occasional spreadsheet or other tidbit), I'm satisfied. I don't play the hottest, newest games and have no need for lightning-fast internet access. I have an older machine, and an ancient video card, but I doubt I could make full use of a more sophisticated machine anyway. I have relatives who insist on buying the latest machine, and even I giggle politely—it reminds me of the person who buys a $90,000 four-

wheel-drive truck to use to go to and from the mall.

2) While I play them from time to time, RPGs are not my hobby.* I have achieved some small degree of success at writing them, and I try to keep up with advances in the state of the art, but I am not really a roleplayer at heart. By extension, I am a very poor GM (a subject I have touched on before).

3) While I read voraciously, I have huge gaps in my reading, especially my science fiction reading. I have, for example, never read anything except a few short stories by Orson Scott Card, and never managed to get very far into the **Dumarest of Terra Series** (which forms the foundation of so much of the **Traveller** background). Most of my reading during the period after **GDW** closed and before I moved to **SJ Games** was taken up re-reading books I already owned, and the habit continued even after I moved to Austin (I make it a point to re-read C. S. Forester's **Hornblower Series** at least once a year, for example).

4) I have almost no interest in astronomy, and find most discussions of brown dwarfs and green giants confusing after a time. So much is changing in planetary science, almost every day, that it is hard for me to keep up on things, especially since I have so many other things to keep up on. Some people seem to be offended in discovering this, but the SF I grew up reading didn't think such things were of overwhelming importance. I've heard that the orbital mechanics of the star system in Asimov's classic "**Nightfall**" are impossible by the current state of knowledge, but it doesn't change the story one bit—it's a great read, 50 years later.

The important thing to remember is something I hinted at in my first paragraph: I don't need to be up to the state of the art in every art and science known—I have an enormous panel of fans and experts to consult over important points.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Miniature wargaming is my hobby. I've been a leadpusher since 1967, and I'm not going to quit now.

Jul 21, 2003, Art Again

For those of you who don't already know, I am once again **SJ Games**' art director, and that's all the excuse I need to do an editorial on the subject. I have previously touched on the importance of art in RPGs (wherein I set forth my "Art is important because it shows people what the world looks like" notion). I didn't discuss a few other important points, however. One might call them general principles of the art director's trade. I won't deal with the myriad problems of scheduling and such . . . people can figure those out for themselves (and they are pretty boring anyway).

The first general principle is that people are hard to draw. As human beings, we know what other Human beings look like, how they move, etc., and our eyes are very sensitive to minor errors, especially in details like hands and faces. For this reason, artists train extensively to draw people, art courses spend a lot of time on the techniques for drawing people, and there are many aides to help the artist out when drawing people (look in any art supply store for mannequins and "pose books"). This creates a problem for SF games like T**raveller.** Artists draw what they know and when what you want is an alien, the artist will (often unconsciously) put human features into the drawing, even if the specifications don't call for them. If a given alien has a slight ridge down the middle of its face, the average artist will (unless carefully instructed not to) make it into a nose (adding nostrils, etc.). Artists drawing Vargr and Aslan are particularly subject to this sort of thing, but the closer to Humanoid

the alien is, the greater the temptation.

The second general principle is that it is nearly impossible to get two different artists to draw the same thing exactly alike. Early on, artists are trained to develop an individual style, and duplication of other artists' work is seen as the mark of an amateur. What this means for RPG illustration is that very specific directions (and often, examples of drawings from other artists) must be given to the artist so the subject will look like the fans expect.*

The third general principle is that artists do their best work when allowed the maximum of creativity, but in illustrating a specific RPG world or a scene from the text, they must limit that creativity to conform to the description requirements. The longer and more detailed the description, the less satisfaction for the artist. This usually results in one of two things: the artist does less than his best work, or the artist wants more money (presumably to compensate him for the lack of creative challenge in the work). I try to give the artist the details necessary to satisfy the background that has been established, but I try to stay away from detailed instructions on composition unless other requirements demand it. I also try to leave minor details up to the individual—describing everything is simply not practical.

All of which brings me to an interesting phenomenon I have noticed over the years: some fans take game "illos" as gospel for all sorts of things that are not intended to be so. Artists drawing starship interiors are given general instructions, but are very rarely given specific examples of things like hatch details or dimensions. Yet I have seen fans insisting that because some minor detail is not pictured, that detail does not exist. I have seen fans to draw complex conclusions about a game world based on a single illustration.

To name one example from the **GDW** game **Space: 1889**: A fan once concluded that Humans and Martians in the game were interfertile (something the designers did not intend—being one of the designers, I know this for certain), based on the fact that a book cover showed a male Human standing in what the fan interpreted as a protective pose next to a female Martian. Nothing of the kind was intended. The artist had been given general guidelines for the painting (including the instruction to put a Human and a Martian in the foreground), but he made one of them female for reasons of his own. The "protective pose" was a figment of the fan's imagination—it was (in my humble opinion) a "ready for action" pose, although the matter is open for interpretation. In the game, we never got around to discussing the question, although we intended to do so eventually (you can't cover everything at once, and **Space: 1889**: had to cease publication for reasons I won't go into, before we had a chance to fully explore the setting).

Fans seek to fill in details of every game. Art helps them do this, but game illustrations, by themselves, are often shaky evidence for such things as the shape of doorknobs and details of interspecies relations.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Another slightly annoying aspect of some artists is their inability to draw the same thing the same way twice. I won't name names here (although I have not worked with any of them recently), but I have worked with my share of them. Usually the question "Why did you draw [insert subject matter here] differently?" is answered "I wasn't satisfied with the way it looked."

Aug 15, 2003, Deck Planning

The first deck plans for **Traveller*** were intended to be used to game out firefights, and this one fact explains a number of things fans continue to debate to the present day. We

used 1/2" counters** for **Snapshot** because we were producing a boardgame (although we were miniatures gamers, we would not publish a set of miniatures rules until later), and this dictated the size of the squares. I've forgotten why we went with squares instead of hexes . . . there were advantages and disadvantages to both, and it was designer's choice. Another point: all of our early deck plans were a bit sparse on furniture. We chose not to include things like control consoles and furniture on the board, and I don't remember why. Perhaps it was an art consideration . . . the cheapest source of such artwork would have been the various commercially available rub-down symbol sets for use by architects, and those tended to be a little short on control consoles and suitable-looking chairs, so the end result would have looked a little silly. In any case, the size of the squares was one factor in **GDW**'s decision to go with 15mm figures when we finally got around to licensing a minis line (the other major factor was that vehicles would be easier to scratch-build). As I get older, however, and my eyesight fades, I find larger figures easier to paint. I have always preferred 25/28mm for all but the largest skirmish games, for reasons I won't take the space to discuss here.

The designs of both ships represented on the **Snapshot** game board (the Sulieman-class scout and the Beowulf-class free trader) reflected the need for the game to have long corridors and gameable fields of fire, so the starships were laid out "airliner" fashion, with the floors parallel to the direction of thrust. This last bit is a source of some friction between fans who prefer the "airliner" approach and those who prefer the "skyscraper" approach to starship design (where the decks are at right angles to the direction of thrust). "Skyscrapers" can achieve simulated gravity by constantly accelerating at 1 G, whereas airliners require artificial gravity and some means of negating the forces of acceleration. "Skyscraper" deck plans don't work well with small ships such as those in Snapshot, because the decks are small and not well suited to a fun game. Larger ships, however, can use this format and still remain interesting (as **Azhanti High Lightning** demonstrates). Small ships (sometimes called "adventurer-class" ships) require fewer sheets, and are more economically feasible (one of the things I determined as part of the process of working with **GURPS Traveller: Starships** was that the deck plans for a Tigress-class dreadnought (done to our deck plan scale) would have to retail at something like $1,800 (15mm would still be over $1,000)—this is not an economically feasible product.

Another factor limiting deck plans was that they were mostly printed in digest size books in the first few years of the game, which meant that 8" x 10" (a two page spread in a digest-sized book) was the practical limit for the size of a single deck. There are a few exceptions, but this is one reason why the ships Traveller focussed on tended to be smaller (and there are those fans who consider this a good thing).

There are still practical limits on deck plans. Printing limitations mean that we cannot do color plans inside books without bumping the price higher than most fans want to pay. For similar reasons, we cannot do a great deal of greyscale shading on most plans.

Which brings me to a point of personal preference: I don't much care for full-color, highly detailed deck plans. They look great, but I prefer deck plans to look more like blueprints, even when using miniatures. Of course, my ultimate preference is to use miniatures on a scale model of the ship, with movable furniture . . . but those are not viable products either, so they are harder to come by.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Produced, to the best of my fading memory, for the **GDW** game **Snapshot**.
** Shortly after **GDW** was founded, one of us (I forget who) came up with the idea that we should "pad" out a print run of counters by having sheets of blank white paper laminated

to the cardboard and then die-cut. We thus got a supply of blank counters in 1/2" and 5/8" sizes, which came in very handy for various projects. We also had a good- sized stash of blank hex sheets.

Sep 1, 2003 (Guest Editorial) Behind the Veil

Editor's Note: Loren Wiseman spent this weekend at **DragonCon** in Atlanta, so I'm standing in for him for this issue's editorial. Loren will be back in two weeks.

We have a saying: "It's not what you don't know that hurts you, it's what you think is so that isn't." *

Over the last 25 or more years, **Traveller** has built up a vast storehouse of "canon" associated with the predominant Third Imperium setting. Maps of space, maps of worlds, characters, bits of history, technological assumptions—by now there are on the order of a hundred officially published books covering the setting. That leaves aside all the material which has been published and lovingly archived by **Traveller** fans over the years.

This presents a challenge for anyone hoping to write (or edit) new Third Imperium material. There's a lot to know.** Official canon must be preserved as far as possible. Even the fan-produced material is significant—the fans consider it impolite when we override the more popular and well-known of their works.

One way to approach this challenge is to be a revisionist. Many of the setting's cultures have been presented in limited detail, and are rich with stereotype. Even without ignoring or contradicting "canonical" material, it's possible to move past the stereotypes, presenting a long-familiar fictional civilization in fresh ways. Suddenly, we can invite our readers to discover the truth behind the stereotypes, and realize suddenly that they never really understood this piece of the setting after all.

An alien culture with real depth—one in which even the strange or frightening elements turn out to have logical reasons—is much better for roleplaying. Players can find themselves sympathizing even with an adversary, once they are able to think of him as more than a cardboard cutout. They'll respect that adversary more, and they may fear him more once they can no longer be sure in advance how he will behave.

In the meantime, a setting which always offers new things for players to discover is one that will hold their interest. This is an important consideration for people whose job it is to produce the books.

In the upcoming months, new **GURPS Traveller** books are going to spend a lot of time looking behind the veil of long-held stereotypes. Familiar figures such as the Sword Worlders, the Solomani, and the Vilani are all going to be held up for examination in a new light. It's going to be a lot of fun writing and editing these books; we hope you'll have a lot of fun reading and making use of them.

Jon F. Zeigler
Acting Editor, **JTAS**

* Attributed to Mark Twain, if my Googling skills don't betray me.

** Several years ago, after having written one book for **Steve Jackson Games**, I considered writing for their new game **In Nomine**. Eventually I decided against it, on the grounds that there was too much prior canon to be learned before I could contribute. Shortly afterward, it was announced that **Steve Jackson Games** would begin publishing material for **Traveller** and was seeking out authors. I sent Loren Wiseman a query e-mail. The rest is history, and goes to show that life is full of irony.

Sep 14, 2003, More On Aliens

In some ways, aliens (non-Human ones anyway) were an afterthought in **Traveller.** Marc had been working on the game before **Star Wars** came out, and we had even play-tested some early versions of the rules before the phrase "*Star Wars* cantina" would have made any sense to us. Science fiction without aliens is not totally unprecedented—many classics of the genre contain no reference to anything but humans. However, by the time the initial rules (the three "little black books") were ready to go to print, Marc had decided that **Traveller** would be more than a single product, and was sketching out alien species for inclusion in later products. At this time, there was still no concept of an "official" background. By 1981, the publication of the **Aliens Handout** set down the first descriptions of the main aliens in the **Traveller** universe—this handout contains the first explanation of the concepts of "major race" and "minor race" and gives thumbnail descriptions (but no stats).

Doing aliens that are more than just "people in suits" is tough. Famous SF editor (and writer*) John Wood Campbell, Jr. used to ask his writers for aliens that thought as well as a man, but not like a man. In a previous editorial, I discussed the problems we faced in making the **Traveller** aliens really alien.

Likewise, I have previously mentioned that the basic layout of what has come to be called "*Charted Space*" by the fans is based on an unpublished boardgame by Marc Miller, showing a central human empire surrounded by six alien entities (this was to be a grand strategic level game, with an enormous hex scale)—I'm not sure if it ever had a formal title, and in any case I don't remember it. Marc may discuss it on his website or one of the associated pages. The aliens in the game were never really developed as more than just labels on map, but some of Marc's preconceived notions ended up in **Traveller.** The Hivers on the boardgame map were avian, for example (Marc once told me he saw them as more-or-less kiwi-shaped, but with manipulative appendages). Marc specifically did not want the Hivers to be insect- like, as he felt that would be too trite, given the name (Later, John Harshman, Bill Keith, and I created the Hivers as they currently exist).

Although we did not intend it, we ended up with a range of aliens distributed along the spectrum of "zipper in front" to "almost incomprehensible," and it doesn't seem to have made any difference in their popularity. The Vargr and Aslan are our two most "zippered" aliens, and they are among the most popular of the three. On the other end of the spectrum, the Hivers are probably our strangest alien species, yet they too are quite popular.

The K'kree are easily the most despised, but not because they are too alien (or not alien enough). What John, Bill, Andy, and I were trying for was a sophont based on an herbivore, with a herd mentality—one that would be a challenge for people to play yet still be comprehensible by the average person. The subtleties of playing a race without a concept of individuality (which all of us thought would appeal to those seeking something different in an RPG) were overwhelmed by what we considered a minor aspect of their character . . . the species' militant vegetarianism. We struck a nerve, quite unintentionally, and inspired no end of barbecue recipes.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Author of **Who Goes There?**, which is the basis for both the 1951 and 1982 movies titled **The Thing**.

Sep 29, 2003, A Few Teeny Little Things

A long time ago, in a game company way, way afar, I used to handle game questions. Frank Chadwick felt that every designer should deal with game questions (or at least read them) because that showed him what parts of the rules gave people trouble, and allowed him to make improvements in future products. I did my share (we rotated the duty).

Several times during my "tour of duty," I was asked: "Why do I have to include an SSAE*?"—a question usually accompanied by remarks such as "How long can it take you to address an envelope?" and "Surely you can afford a single first class stamp?" It never occurred to me to reply: "If it's such a little thing, why are you unable to do it?"

The letter-writers implied that I had only one letter to deal with, and had merely to open the letter, deal with its requirements, and then go back to my regular duties. Such was not the case. Rules questions, except for the most basic ones, are (and were) not something I can answer off the top of my head. Quite often, they require reference to several books, and necessitate close reading and cross-comparison of several pages from each. Over and above that, however, is this: One little thing is still a little thing. A thousand little things become a big thing.**

Just as the small details of correspondence can bind together into hours of work, the minutiae of GMing can combine to become overwhelming. It was during the initial playtests of **GDW**'s **Twilight: 2000** game that I first saw this principle in action. I had helped to create a very simple, elegant means for resolving gunfights. I had helped create a very simple, elegant system for resolving melee combat. Ditto for cross-country travel, combat with animals, and a dozen other systems. But when they were all combined together, they formed a choking, confusing morass. We were trying to do too much at the same level of detail, and we were drowning the playtest GMs. We applied the lesson to our later games, and our products became the better for it.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Stamped, Self-Addressed Envelope.

** Authors often run into similar problems with autograph seekers. I**saac Asimov** used to talk about the number of people who seemed to think that they could simply offer to send him a check in payment for an autographed copy of a given book—evidently under the assumption that he not only had a supply of every book he'd ever written stacked in his house somewhere, but that he also was ready at a moment's notice to pack and ship them. Most authors will happily autograph a book for you by mail (myself included), but almost every one I know of insist that you buy the copy through conventional channels and send it along with a pre-addressed, prepaid envelope. The dynamics of publishing and the book market are changing this, however—I know of several authors who have begun selling books "out of the garage," as it were.

Nov 09, 2003, What is Traveller?

I already participated in Chris Thrash's **What is Traveller? poll,*** and I thought an annotated discussion of "*What **Traveller** Means to Me*" might be interesting to more than a few people. Herewith, a short summary of what I think is most important to Traveller and why.

1. *Communication Limited to the Speed of Travel:* This is the most important facet of the game for me (although it edges out item number two by only a small margin). Few SFRPGs place this restriction on their universes, and it would change the whole feel of the game for me if FTT (faster than travel) commo were available. I think limited communication is a good thing in **Traveller** because it places a greater emphasis on actions by the sophont on the spot, which is more conducive to good adventures. An example from history: the **Crimean War** saw one of the first limited uses of the telegraph in warfare. I say limited because the British commander at the far end became annoyed at the attempts of those higher in command to micromanage him, and ripped out the cables, claiming he could not fight "tethered to a copper wire."

2. *Jump Takes a Week*: My reasoning on this ties in with the above—superiors need to be (relatively) remote in order to preserve some independence of action for adventurers. If the boss is months away, it gives individual adventurers a greater sense of control over their own destinies. I could be persuaded that a few days would be just as good, but a week has a nice feel to it. Also, I have no argument with individual GMs who implement a form of relativity in jump travel—a week to outside observers is a much shorter time to those in jump (which results in longer "perceived" lifespans for those who travel a great deal).

3. *Pre-Generation Character History*: It is easy to forget that **Traveller** was among the first games to devote any great amount of attention to the previous life of the characters. I think this is a major factor in what made the game unique back in the day, and it should remain a feature today. I've seen people spend hours creating a character, and lovingly crafting a "biography" for him—in years past, I did it myself. It is a tremendous help to working out a character's motivation and behaviors.

4. *Shotguns in Space:* People have been talking about this since the start of **Traveller,** and all I can say is that we are not the only ones. Other RPGs still have slugthrowers, even SF movies still use them (Aliens, for one). Words like "disintegrators," "blasters," "phasers," and so on conjure up images in the mind's eye—and some of these images are not "serious" SF. We did eventually add some energy weapons, but we also added more and cooler slugthrowers (ETC anyone?).

5. "*Small Ship*" Adventures: I'm generally in favor of these, but I am less happy with a "small ship universe" for reasons that I cannot quantify. My universe can have large ships in it . . . but the adventurers don't own them. I prefer small ships running around, barely paying their bills and looking to strike it rich (but never quite arriving—the struggle is the glory). I don't care for galaxy-spanning, high-level campaigns that involve thousands of systems and enormous starfleets. I recognize the arguments in favor of smaller Imperia, lower populations, and so on. But there's just something about the Third Imperium that sings to me.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* See the Discussion boards for details. Chris has summarized the results twice.

Nov 24, 2003, Picture This

Recent discussions on the **Traveller Mailing List (TML)** involved the actual size of various starship components (staterooms and the like) and how these compared to their real-life counterparts. When the **GDW** staff began working with deck plans on a serious basis, we took masking tape and marked off one of the large rooms in the office area with 1.5 meter (about 5 foot) squares*. We took some of our office furniture and began laying out

how much space was actually taken up by (say) a desk and chair. We measured or searched architectural textbooks for dimensions for all sorts of things: movie/bus/airplane/fast-food seating, passenger liner staterooms, railroad sleeper bunks, and so on. I took copious notes on my brother's camper, paying special attention to the size of the beds (folded and deployed) and the size of the shower/bathroom facilities (I was surprised how small a fully functional lavatory can be made). We used this information to help form a mental image of the size of the various starship components as we created deck plans. For reasons I cannot now remember, we did not make these notes available to anyone outside **GDW** (I'm sure **FASA** and **DGP** would have found them very useful).

I bring this up because several people on the **TML** seemed incredulous at the actual size of starships and their internal components. One group (consisting mostly of Americans who lived in suburban houses with plenty of closet space) found it hard to believe that people could exist for months on end in a stateroom "about the size of my walk-in closet" (as one poster remarked). The other group (consisting of ex-submariners, urban studio apartment dwellers, college dormitory inhabitants, and others used to living in cramped quarters) felt the space we allotted to starship crew quarters was adequate (*albeit* not generous).

To help players and GMs get a mental picture of the actual size of various things, I suggest you take a leaf from **GDW**'s book. Get some masking tape (or crepe paper strips) and lay out a stateroom (temporarily, of course). People with access to a large flat area might take a Saturday and lay out the decks of a scout or **Beowulf** (using sticks and string) and photograph the results for later reference (I have a faint memory of someone marking the ship out using white chalk normally used in marking football fields).

All of this helps add to the perceived reality of the game, and helps people picture things in their mind's eye.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* The tape stayed on the floor until we ripped out the linoleum a few years later.

Dec 08, 2003, Fashions Now and Later

One of the most important features of **Traveller** artwork (indeed, of any RPG's artwork) is to illustrate what the game world looks like. Players need something to help them form a picture in their mind's eye, and illos are a major influence on that visualization. One of the aspects of illustrating a game is costume—what people wear.

The question of clothing in **Traveller** is very complex. Realistically, what people wear several thousand years in the future is probably not going to resemble what we wear now . . . although there will be certain common features. Less than 150 years ago, for example, men's shirts came with separate sleeves, and with detachable collar and cuffs (which were not cloth, but celluloid plastic, and must have been as uncomfortable as all get-out). On the other hand, illustrations need to be recognizable to the person of the present day, and need to convey certain things by a kind of visual shorthand (see my editorial **The Look of the Future**). Clothing conveys clues about social status, wealth, cultural and (sometimes) political affiliations, authority, and a myriad other things. As inhabitants of the 21st century, we recognize the visual clues represented by clothing—a military uniform tells us things about the wearer, a police uniform tells us something different, and a doorman's uniform tells us something else entirely. We can discern these details because we are familiar with what fashion and clothing mean in the 21st century. For this reason, illustrations of the far future, if they are to convey the same information, must have some recognizable clothing cues.

One of the charms of **Traveller** is that each GM can make up details to fit his own vision of the universe. Sophisticated 3D drawing programs specializing in the Human figure such as Poser have made it possible for creative GMs to make their own futuristic clothing (and post them to their websites).

The art cannot look too familiar, however, or the universe pictured in the mind's eye will not be alien or futuristic enough, and enjoyment of the game will suffer. When we ask an artist to draw a noble, a farmer, a debutante, or a factory worker, he has to walk a tightrope between the recognizable and the unusual. My notions on the subject will be (partially) revealed in the upcoming **GURPS Traveller: Nobles Book.**

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

Dec 22, 2003, The First JTAS Contest!

Are you looking for something to help you while away the long winter nights? Have you always wanted an excuse to spend a few more hours in front of your computer? Do you desire the fame and money that go hand in hand with writing RPGs? If so, read on . . .

I have the great pleasure to announce the first ever **JTAS** contest! The contest is open to all **JTAS** subscribers, so now is your chance to go toe-to-toe with the best. Sharpen your keyboards and get ready to write.

The theme of the contest is **Adventure Soup**: throw in whatever items are in the fridge, and make something tasty. In this case, the items are the three unrelated articles in this issue of **JTAS**. The something tasty is an adventure. Contestants must write an adventure of no more than 2,500 words, using the contents of each of this issue's articles as a major plot point or part of the setting.

Articles may use rules from any **Traveller** incarnation. However, entries must conform to **SJ Games** style and **Traveller** style. They must be proofread and spellchecked prior to submission. Any entries failing to meet these criteria will be ruthlessly expunged from the contest and my computer.

Adventures should be submitted in plain text format, pasted into the body of the e-mail. The designation [**JTAS Contest**] must appear in the subject line, and the article must be preceded by the author's contact information (as per the regular submission guidelines) and a word count. All entries must be received by January 13, 2004. One entry per subscriber.

The contest will be judged by the one-and-only Loren Wiseman, **Traveller Guru** and **JTAS Senior Editor**. Loren will not know who has written the articles and will judge them solely on their merits. The three best adventures, as decided by Loren, will appear in three consecutive issues of **JTAS,** and will be paid for at our regular rates. Adventures that are not chosen to appear may be posted at the authors' own websites, as long as they include a link to **JTAS**.

Any questions about the contest rules should be addressed to *jtas@sjgames.com.* Good luck, and blessings of the season be upon you!

Alain H. Dawson
JTAS Editor

2004

2004

Jan 05, 2004, Firefly

I received an early Christmas present last week* . . . the DVD of Joss Whedon's **Firefly,** containing fourteen episodes, and presented in the order Whedon intended them to be seen. There are ample extras of the usual sort, including commentaries by Whedon and others, a gag reel, cast interviews, and deleted scenes. The extra scenes seem to be those that were included to re-establish continuity after the network decreed the series would be shown in a different order than originally intended. I have already made my opinions known about how much I like this series, and I encourage everyone who enjoys SF to at least consider buying it. I think that **Traveller** GMs will find the series a goldmine of ideas and situations for adventures, and a good springboard for a campaign. Why? Several reasons:

Firstly, **Firefly** deals with a "tramp" starship (named Serenity) engaging in speculative trade and occasionally turning to smuggling and other less than legal activities. Serenity is a **Firefly**-class transport, a very common type prized by small operators for a variety of reasons. The parallels to **Traveller's Beowulf**-class are immediately obvious.

Secondly, the episodes of the series deal with a variety of escapades, including a breakdown in the middle of space (**Out of Gas**), a salvage operation (**Bushwacked**), several business deals of varying legality (**Train Job, Trash**, and others), a full-dress "caper" (**Ariel**), a couple of comic relief episodes (**Shindig, Our Mrs Reynolds, Jaynestown,** a spooky episode that defies easy categorization (Objects in Space), and others. Fourteen plots, dozens of great characters, great lines seemingly without number ("*We gotta go to the crappy town where I'm a hero!*"), and numerous "bits of business" that would fit in almost any campaign with a little work (one of the cargoes they smuggle is a load of bobble-head Geisha dolls).

Firefly shows how to use a recurring nemesis to good effect, (twice, if you count the woman we first meet as "Saffron"), how to run criminals with moral limits, and how to derail the best laid plans of mice and free traders. There was also a number of "uber-story" plot elements in development: involving a mysterious corporation ("Blue Sun"), evil guys wearing blue rubber gloves, and several interpersonal relationships (or potentials thereof).

Of primary importance, however, is the fact that the crew of Serenity operates as a team. Most action-adventure TV shows have a single protagonist (two if it is a "buddy" show), and a varying number of secondary characters. There are major and minor characters in **Firefly,** but the secondary characters are still important, and even the minor, one-time encounters seem three dimensional and fully-developed. This allows the episodes to be ported to RPG sessions easily and without the GM juggling too many things.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* So no one is confused, this is being written before Christmas. Lead time does things like that to things like this.

Jan 19, 2004, The Playtest

The playtest for **GURPS Traveller**: Nobles is under way, and I thought people would be interested in an author's view of such things.

For those of you who don't know, we writers become involved in what we write—some deeply, some less so. For myself, I can hardly stand to look at anything I've written for a period of weeks after I finish with it (I always think everything I've written is equally bad)

but eventually, I can look at it and be happy with it. It has been long enough since I handed over the first draft that I have reached this stage with the Nobles manuscript, and I have developed a growing possessiveness about the work.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that I am reacting defensively to many of the comments that are being made. This, I have learned, is the next stage writers go through: First we hate every word and cannot bear to look at any of them, then we love every word and cannot bear to change a single one.

For this reason, I am trying to limit my responses to the playtest comments. My initial reaction to the playtest comments was not quite "How dare these heartless Philistines criticize my work!"—but it came close. Upon a few minutes of reflection, however, I moderated my feelings. Just as I was wrong to think everything was worthless as I was writing it, I am equally wrong to think that every jot and tittle* is perfection. People are bringing up things that are important, and which I (in my omniscience) managed to express poorly or overlook entirely. Some things that I thought would be the most heavily debated are not being remarked upon at all, and other things I thought would be received with unanimous acclamation are the subject of intense debate.

Of course, the playtest remarks are as varied as the playtesters themselves. One person is concerned with broad strokes, another focuses on tiny details of the society. Everyone has a point of view. Many people have clear agendas. All are concerned with making the final product better. The biggest problem is that not every suggestion can be accommodated, because many are contradictory and no small number would require changes to the **Traveller Third Imperium** background will not be allowed by Marc Miller.

Overall, the manuscript is being received well, I think, and that's the important part.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* "Every jot and tittle" is an old, archaic phrase meaning "Every little thing."

Feb 02, 2004, Contest Redux

"Hey Alain," many of you are wondering, "how goes it with the **JTAS** contest?"

Well, this being the first contest in this 'zine's history, it's been a learning process for **JTAS** (i.e., me). Several subscribers have written to me saying that they would have sent in an entry, but they didn't have enough time to make the deadline. Others submitted entries, but said they would have been happier if they'd had more time to polish their text. Far be it from me to curtail people's creativity with a short deadline. I want the contestants to send in their most competitive work. That's good for the contest, and good for you, our readers. As of this issue, the deadline has been extended to March 1, 2004. Those of you who already submitted entries are welcome to work on them some more and resubmit, if you so choose. The rules of the contest remain the same.

Of course, instead of extending the time limit, I could reduce the maximum word count. The contest announcement spun off two mini contests on the discussion boards when someone noted that I did not state a minimum word count. A few people tried their hands at creating the shortest adventure that would meet the contest criteria. Here's Brian Hurell's:

The party misjumps to a rogue planet. With no fuel to jump again, they are trapped . . . or so it seems. However, they encounter a massive crystalline entity that, while friendly, also has enough hydrogen locked within its internal structure to fuel the ship for a jump back to the main spacelanes. The entity is invulnerable to all weapons but one . . .

Then Joe Gill beat Brian's word count with this:

"Tell us all you know about rogue planets," the telepath said to the Seeker, "or we'll blow you apart with a shotgun."

At that point, Brian Hurell coined the phrase "*adventure haiku,*" which led to the shortest and (in my opinion) most esthetically pleasing adventure, by Jonathan Carryer:

Shotgun-armed folk ask

Where are we, strange crystal form? Rogue planet, it says

You guys made my day. I'm glad to have provided unintended hours of amusement for **JTAS** subscribers.

What all this brings home to me is that **Traveller** provides an opportunity for people to get together, flex their creative muscles, and have fun. Not that fans need **Traveller** to be creative, but its format provides a particular challenge, like a sonnet . . . or a haiku . . .

Alain H. Dawson
JTAS Editor

Feb 16, 2004, Alternate Travellers

Most of the fans already know that **Traveller**, when it originally came out in the "three little black books" form, was intended to be a (more or less) generic SFRPG—players were expected to supply their own background and campaign parameters. One of the original purposes of the print **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** when it first appeared in 1978* was to present adventures, campaign backgrounds, and advise players and referees how to adapt the rules to their favorite SF novel. We never really got too deep into this sort of thing, however, because we rapidly found that the customers weren't interested in "rolling their own" universe(s)—the vast majority (as expressed in their letters and in person at conventions) wanted an "official" game background.

This is easily seen in the first few issues of **JTAS**. The first issue's main article, **The Annic Nova**, made mention of a place called "**the Spinward Marches**" but gave no specifics. Marc had some general notions for his personal campaign setting, and these included a **Spinward Marches** sector, but there really wasn't much beyond that. As everyone now knows, we soon discovered that there was considerable demand for a specific, officially-supported game background, and the totality of our publication efforts were devoted to it.

Our original intention was to have a large, overbearing, more-or-less evil empire opposed by a group of rebels who would be the good guys. With the publication of Frank Chadwick's "**Emperors of the Third Imperium**" article, however, we switched polarities and made the empire (the Third Imperium) into the good guys. When we got the notion of publishing what would become the **Fifth Frontier War** boardgame, we needed to create more of the background so the game could have a history. When we decided to conduct a pre-publication publicity campaign by using the **Traveller News Service** to reveal the events of the road to war, we had to create numerous news items that were not connected with the war—red herrings as it were—and we soon found ourselves creating a campaign setting more or less by accident. Fortunately for us, it was a setting a large number of people enjoyed adventuring in.

What is less well-known is this: **GDW** planned to begin releasing additional campaign backgrounds after the publication of **Traveller: The New Era;** the first would have been an adaptation of **2300 AD** to the TNE mechanics, followed by **Space: 1889** and then others. One of the reasons **Fire, Fusion, and Steel** included so many alternate technologies was to allow us the freedom to do a wider variety of campaign backgrounds.

I even suggested we might want to do an alternate Third Imperium, where the Ine Givar were the good guys . . .

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* My stars and garters! Has it been that long? How time flies when you're having fun.

Mar 02, 2004, How Many Books!?!

It seems I created a poll last issue that touched on a topic dear to fans' hearts. I didn't know it at the time. To be honest, I was late thinking up a poll, and I chose that one because I could type it in quickly. (One's typing speed improves dramatically when trying to beat a fixed upload deadline.) However, I have gotten more mail about this poll than any previous polls combined. It certainly provoked an interesting discussion, which is more than some polls do.

I was impressed by the staggering number of books many of you have. The bell curve of the poll peaked at 41-50 books. Yowzah. And of the fair number of people who wrote in to prove that they have more books than Loren, many of them convinced me that they really did. Marc Miller owes all of you a thank-you note.

The question everyone wanted answered was, "how many books does Loren have?" The answer is . . . I don't know. And honestly, neither does Loren (although he guessed at around 100, with some duplicates). Even if he took an inventory, he'd run into the same question that his challengers did: what constitutes a **Traveller** book? Almost everyone who wrote in asked that question. Print issues of **JTAS?** Duplicate volumes? Different printings and editions? **Traveller** memorabilia?

I think the important thing to be gleaned from this discussion is not the size of Loren's collection, but that the **Traveller** ouvre can support this type of competition. Traveller has so much richness and history for a roleplaying game, one can argue at length about editions and versions and systems. Fortunately for us all, the **Traveller** universe has enough complexity, excitement, terra incognita, and story possibilities to fill hundreds more books.

The breadth and depth of the **Traveller** universe is demonstrated once again in this issue of JTAS. There is an adventure from the ubiquitous Michael Brown about disgruntled hydrocarbon refinery workers crashing a noble party; descriptions and stats for low-tech flying machines from Onno Meyer; and a review of the QLI reprint of **The Basic Books (1-3)**. A new **Traveller** book! Quick! Add it to your collection, or Loren may pull ahead again. Or does the reprint count as a separate book . . . ?
(Now I feel compelled to ask Marc how many **Traveller** books he has.)

Alain H. Dawson
JTAS Editor

Mar 15, 2004, Sword Worlds Double Issue!

Welcome, one and all, to the first **JTAS** double issue. In honor of the release of **GURPS Traveller: Sword Worlds**, I have compiled seven **Sword Worlds** articles for your delectation. That's 133 percent more **JTAS** for your money. Hurry and get yours today!

I will be the first to admit that this issue is a budget-buster for **JTAS**, but we at **Steve Jackson Games** are committed to supporting our products to the best of our abilities, so it's worth a little red ink once and a while. I hope that you will particularly enjoy our offerings

this bi-week.

The authors of **Sword Worlds** have pitched in to create a passel of useful additions to the book. From Paul Drye, there are designer's notes and an **Amber Zone** that could be a campaign in itself. From Rob Prior, no less than three articles; two Casual Encounters and a heavy destroyer with auxiliary craft. Hans Rancke-Madsen has created a setting good for room-by-room fighting, horror, intrigue, mystery, espionage, or good old-fashioned jump-out-of-a-dark-place-and- scare-the-daylights-out-of-each-other space-station tag. Rounding it all out is Alain Ducharme, with yet another **Casual Encounter**; a woman who had to chose between loyalty to the **Sword Worlds**, or to her (now **Border World**) planet.

And, of course, no issue this important would be complete without some background history on the creation of the **Sword Worlds** from Loren Wiseman. So without further ado, I turn you over to Loren.

Shortly before the publication of the first issue of the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society,** Marc asked me if the Romans had any famous swords—named ones, that is. I told him they did not, and said that was more a medieval shtick. He expanded the question to the ancient world as a whole, and I said there were names assigned to the swords of famous ancient warriors, but these were created by later chroniclers, and were almost certainly fictitious. I asked him if he knew about the various named weapons in Norse mythology. He told me he already had those, and then explained why he needed the names. Not only was this my first glimpse of the Sword Worlds, it was my first clue he was actually working on the **Spinward Marches** sector.

The first mention of the SM sector was in the "**Annic Nova**" article, which was the lead article in the first **JTAS.** The mention of the **Spinward** was a throwaway line (I thought) but Marc had wider plans even then. I knew of the **Sword Worlds Books** of H. Beam Piper, but I had not read all of them. It seems remarkable to me, more than two decades later, that people are still extending and expanding what we started back then.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

Alain H. Dawson
Editor, **JTAS**

Mar 28, 2004, I Just Don't Get it

There are many things about the world that I don't understand. By "understand" I mean I just don't get them on a gut level, although I may grasp them intellectually. A few **Traveller**-related ones are:

The need to break down every weapon/vehicle/starship/world design and re-assemble it. The people who do this call it "reverse engineering" and—I assume—it usually comes about because they are trying to make a spreadsheet to design weapons/vehicles/starships/worlds of their own, and they are trying to test said spreadsheet by duplicating something from the game. When the product of their spreadsheet doesn't match the game specs to three significant digits, they often panic and e-mail me (with attachments containing enormous files for some spreadsheet program my machine refuses to read) asking me to "help them out" by either locating the mistake in their calculations, redesigning their spreadsheet(s), or admitting that the relevant design and or design system is flawed.*

The problem with this is that people expect their results to be identical to some huge number of decimal places. Because different programs handle things different ways, or be-

cause people make different assumptions about things, or for whatever reason this never happens.

A related case: people who want their every design to be the absolute best design possible. Some people need (not want . . .) to have starship, vehicle, or (heaven forbid) world where every cubic inch/centimeter/whatever is used to the fullest. These people call their creations "fully optimized" but I find it another form of obsession with detail—aside from the fact that there is no "perfect design" in what we laughingly call the real world.

People who use "turrent" when they mean "turret." It shows up too often to be a typo, which means some people clearly think it is the correct spelling. I first noticed it many years ago in The Morrow Project (where it was used too consistently to be a typo), but I have seen it in a growing number of places. I've even heard people pronounce it that way. Many words end in "ent" so it is a natural assumption for muscle memory to take over and add the "n" unconsciously (this is my explanation for why it is so widespread). Nevertheless, spellcheckers should catch this, unless "turrent" has been added to the user dictionary for some reason (or the person chooses to ignore the spellchecker). I'm willing to back off on this one if someone can show me where the OED (or any other reputable authority) includes "turrent" as a synonym for "turret."

People who follow the rules to the extent that if it isn't mentioned in print in one of the published books, it doesn't exist. I've seen this used to justify all sorts of silliness, but I won't give specific examples because they are too numerous. **GDW**'s design staff assumed people could "fill in the blanks" for obvious things. Many fans share my view in this matter, hence the common phrase on the **TML:** "*Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.*"

None of these things are actually total mysteries to me, and perhaps they are more indicative of the way my mind works than anything else. Nevertheless, I'm interested to know if anyone else shares them.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Anyone who thinks I'm actually likely to pore over someone else's spreadsheet looking for an error doesn't know me very well.

Apr 12, 2004, Rumors 2004

From a recent item on the **JTAS** discussion board:

> > > I hope I didn't miss anything important :)
> > >There were rumors of some fourth edition thingie while you were gone.
> Well, you know how I feel about internet rumors . . .
> Maybe you don't.

I feel strongly that the truth content of most rumors (internet and otherwise) varies between 0 and 5%. I have several reasons for feeling this way, but the main one is that I have had personal experience with watching the most virulent rumors grow from innocuous beginnings. There are several general principles I've noticed over the years.

First, there is a desire to appear connected, to seem an insider, to appear to have hidden knowledge. During my tenure at **GDW**, when I was the company "web-savvy person," I noticed people would often preface their rumors with language indicating their connection with someone "in the know." They would say "I heard this from a reputable source" or "An unnamed insider" and so on, then would proceed to spout gibberish. In my position as

GDW on-line rep, I started pressing people on their sources—it is impolite to call people liars, so I would suggest that they were misinformed and ask who told them. They would normally respond with something like "I don't reveal my sources." or "I don't want to get anyone into trouble." This is mostly nonsense, of course . . . they read something somewhere, and rather than admit that, they act like a reporter testifying at trial . . . "I won't reveal my sources."

Of course, they had no unique sources. In the case of **GDW**, I was a partner, a member of the board of directors, and a corporate officer. I was at every board meeting, and knew of every major decision. I was on a first name basis with everyone on the "inside," and was in a position to know the truth, and how far the rumor was from it.

The second feature of rumors is that each link in the chain modifies the rumor. There's a popular party game (occasionally used in psychology classes) where everyone sits in a circle and a short story is whispered from person to person. When the story has gone "full circle," the last person stands and tells the story aloud to the group, then the first person reads from the written version that started it all. The results are often radically different. The point is that each time a rumor is repeated, it is embroidered, added to, and modified. The people at Snopes keep track of a great many internet rumors and study how they mutate over time.

The third feature, which is really a subset of the second, is that some people deliberately twist rumors to fit their own personal prejudices. This can result in innocuous speculations turning into virulent attacks, and I have seen it several times in connection with **GDW**, although it is thankfully rare.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

Apr 24, 2004, "In a Hundred Years, Who's Gonna Care?"

Historians are divided on how they feel about alternate histories—we either love them or hate them. I fall into the former camp and am fascinated by them. The usual method is to pick a single event that serves as the point of departure, and this leads to the standard science fiction notion that there are an infinity of alternate universes, and that you can therefore get just about any reasonable situation eventually.

Memory is an odd thing, sometimes. I have very clear memories of things that everyone else around me swears never happened or happened differently. There are numerous rational explanations, but those aren't any fun, and are of limited utility in **Traveller**.

Many years ago, while reading in search of something else, I came across something that started me down a different line of thought. I've mentioned this before, on the discussion boards, but a) we have enough new subscribers many people probably didn't see it, and b) the messages go away after a while, so subscribers can't go back and read about it.*

Let me first give you a little historical background—making this editorial both entertaining and educational. In the 3rd Century AD the Sassanid Persians were taking advantage of a slack period in Roman competence (the period is sometimes called "The Crisis of the Third Century") and invading. There is evidence that they laid siege to the city of Antioch and took it. There is equally good evidence that they laid siege to the city and didn't take it. As if this isn't bad enough, there is yet again equally good evidence that they never got anywhere near Antioch. Students of history usually chuckle to themselves and say something about poor records and he like. My first thought was "What if they are all true?"

What if every alternative spawns two or more alternate universes. Further, what if there is only a limited amount of "continuum" available for alternate universes, and when

two universes become effectively identical, they recombine . . . in a literal application of the phrase "In a hundred years, who's gonna care?" Major differences would take hundreds or even thousands of years to "merge." But minor changes might take less time. And you end up with a single present, and multiple pasts. Quite in keeping with my situation as noted above: I remember one past, my friends remember another, but both of us are equally right and equally wrong. The applications of this notion to time travel have some interesting possibilities, especially trying to figure out how to get to a specific past . . .

I leave the application of this notion to a **Traveller** campaign to the reader.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* One comment on the discussion boards was "Why don't you use this in a novel?" My answer was (and remains) that while this is an interesting and useful notion, it takes more than that to make a novel. Simply revealing that the big plot secret is (drum roll) "multiple pasts produce one present" would be greeted with a chorus of yawns by most SF readers.

May 10, 2004, The Last Adventure

A note to players: if your GM uses adventures from **JTAS,** you might want to avoid this editorial. It's OK, you won't hurt my feelings.

This issue, we are trying something new. Steven Marsh, editor of **Pyramid**, decided that it might be fun to do an adventure specifically tailored to end a campaign, or so change the group of characters that they were no longer in the same type of campaign. Steven and I put our heads together and decided to do a Pyramid/JTAS crossover, themed around "**The Last Adventure.**" We will be publishing a series of these adventures during the month of May, and if the response is positive, we may continue to publish this type of article regularly.

Personally, I really like the idea of creating an intentional end to a campaign. I have been in campaigns where, for one reason or another, the end was just left flapping loose. The campaign ended because the group never got together again, not because the story was wrapped up in any satisfying conclusion. I like to play in a campaign for a year or more, to really get to know the characters and go through changes together. Abandoning such a familiar group gives me the same anguish as putting down a good book in mid-read and then losing it forever.

I've also been in campaigns where the GM managed to do a nice wrap-up, and even one or two where the GM was planning the last game right from the first, and had an arc in mind during the entire campaign. There was plenty of room for spontaneity, but it was nice to know that we were heading for a grand climax and denouement.

Sometimes a "**Last Adventure**" can be useful, not for ending a campaign, but for changing its direction. Players or GMs who have had enough of one genre, but like the group of PCs, can simply create a situation in the game that forces the characters into a new milieu. Once in a present-day mercenary game, our GM got fed up with us players, because we couldn't do any job without blowing everything up and killing people. So on a job gone wrong (what other kind is there?) he sent us into another dimension. We dimension-hopped for months, exploring genres from **Land of the Dinosaurs** to **Hitler's Brain is Still Alive in the 50s**, and then got dumped back in our time, having gained psionic abilities, and became fugitives from the government. By these criteria, we had about eight "**Last Adventures**" in that campaign, and a good time was had by all.

The two adventures in this issue will allow either the ending of a campaign, or a change of direction. If these two don't suit your game, there are more on the way in the next issue.

And if you like them, let us know! We'll make more.

Alain H. Dawson
JTAS Editor

May 24, 2004, What a Short, Strange Trip It's Been

Although some of you folks may have figured this out already, here is the official announcement: This is my last issue as editor of **JTAS**. After today, I am returning the reins to the capable hands of Loren Wiseman. I have really come to enjoy working on **JTAS**, and I will miss it. Before I sign off for good, here are a few items of business:

I had wanted to put two **Last Adventures** in this issue, but I cut back to one so as not to turn **JTAS** over to Loren with a huge sinkhole in the budget (just a tiny sinkhole). The good news is, there are two more **Last Adventures** and they will be published in the near future. Please let Loren know if you want to see more of these. (Loren, speaking as a **JTAS** subscriber, I vote "yea.")

There are two reviews in this issue. I got these reviews for **EPIC Adventure I: Stoner Express** around the same time, and I decided that it might be edifying for the **JTAS** readership to see two different opinions on the same product. There is also a **Ship's Locker** about a low-tech cargo runabout, just the thing for those adventures/campaigns that start in a backwater starport (or wind up in one).

No, we haven't forgotten about the contest. It has had to bow out to circumstances. But Loren has the entries, and he will wrap it up in the near future. If you would like to see more contests, different contests, what have you—let Loren know.

On a more personal note—as editor, I tried to find out what people wanted, and give it to them. Of course, any president of the United States knows how hard that is. I tried to make some innovations, because everybody likes to put their own stamp on a project. If I succeeded even in part, I will consider this a job well done.

When I was first offered the chance to edit **JTAS,** I was warned that **Traveller** fans could be cantankerous, obstreperous, nitpicking, and contrary. This is, to some degree, true, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Nobody warned me that **Traveller** fans would be so dedicated, supportive, incredibly knowledgeable, generous, and all in all a great community of folks, but this is also true. Thanks for bearing with me, and I hope every one of you got something good out of **JTAS** during my brief tenure as editor. Roll 'em if you got 'em . . .

Alain H. Dawson
JTAS Editor

Jun 06, 2004, Back in the Saddle Again

As of this issue, I have resumed editorial duties at **JTAS**. Just to explain what's going on, I am no longer working full- time at **SJ Games,** but I am continuing as **GURPS Traveller Line Manager** and **JTAS** editor as an outside contractor. I am now free to take on non-SJG writing projects (with Steve's personal encouragement), and have several irons in the fire (or potential irons) as I type.* Among these are a couple of projects for **Traveller D20** (aka T20), which makes me one of the few people to have work published for every form of **Traveller** (although as one correspondent remarked to me, ". . . after all, who better than you?"). Also, I am negotiating for a license to produce and sell **Traveller** PDFs through my personal website.

The two previous editors (Jon Zeigler and Alain Dawson) have set the bar higher than

it was before, and I anticipate a lot more work on my part to keep up their standards.

Taking a leaf from my predecessors' book(s), I'm going to try for more special and "theme" issues, and more continuing projects, like the "**Last Adventure**" articles that have proven so popular in the past. I want to try more contests also, but to do that, I'll need to locate someone with sufficient standing in the **Traveller** community to act as judge. More news on this front as it breaks.

All in all, I look forward to meeting the challenge of being an editor once more, and I hope the readership will be pleased.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* The principal result of all of this is that my tax forms get a lot more complicated. Those of you who are interested in my sidelines should look at my website (link above) from time to time, noting the "New," "EGBT," and "I'd Rather Be Wargaming" buttons, as well as my **Amazon** link.

Jun 20, 2004, Potpourri Redux

Once again, there is no single topic for the editorial, just a couple things.

I'll announce the winners of the adventure writing contest in the July 5 issue of **JTAS,** and will publish each of the winning articles, one per issue, after that. Shortly after that, I'll start considering what the subject matter should be for the next contest . . . hmmm . . . maybe I'll do that as a poll.

Next, I'd like to remind authors and potential authors of SJG's handy guide to not overusing the word "character." The link has a lot of interesting suggestions for alternatives that will also give the article some variety.

A minor gripe about the internet: I have noticed that people type "alot" when they mean "a lot" . . . and this annoys me for some reason I cannot completely verbalize. Unlike "turrent" instead of "turret," I can see how someone who doesn't like to hit the space bar between words might compress things in this way. I can see how it might occur by accident. But it is cropping up more and more, and I'm beginning to think it is being used as some kind of intentional illiteracy—kind of an iconoclastic reaction against pedantic criticism of spelling on-line. Words can clump together, over time, however,* so it's possible "alot" will enter the dictionary, if it hasn't already**—dictionaries reflect usage, not embalm it.

Finally, since I seem to be in a pedantic mood right now, I'll make a confession. I have trouble with one specific aspect of apostrophes—remembering the difference between the possessive "its" (no apostrophe) and the contraction "it's" ("it is"). This has given me trouble since the 5th grade, and I always have to sit there and think about it. Like most people, I confuse the possessive because every other possessive has an apostrophe in there somewhere (unless I'm mistaken about that too). I can't use semi-colons properly either, but that's a matter for some other time (probably not another editorial, however).

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* "Alright" used to be "all right," afterall. All living languages grow, and the ultimate standard of what a language is is what its users make of it.

** The word "allot" is already in there, and I foresee potential confusion here.

Jul 04, 2004, *Ad Astra per Aspera*

For the Latin-challenged among you, this issue's title is usually translated as "T*o the stars, though difficulties.*" I chose it because it is the norm to pick a *cliché* like it for an essay of the sort I've done for this time. It doesn't have much to do with **Traveller,** except in the general sense of humanity making it into space, and my personal participation therein.

On 22 June, 2004, the first privately funded spacecraft flew over 60 miles up, which is high enough to count as "outer space" by most definitions. You can view the details on the **SpaceShipOne** home page, but the important one for me, personally, was the pilot's age. When I discovered that Mike Melvill was 63 (ten years older than I am), I was almost overcome by a wave of emotion. Why was that so important? Why was I so moved? In a previous editorial, I discussed when my father and I watched the first Apollo landing on the Moon in 1969. At the time, he confessed he never expected to see it happen in his lifetime, and remarked that when he was my age, if someone had told him he would one day watch it all take place as it was happening, he would have thought they were crazy. In that editorial, I wondered what he would have thought had I told him that we would send twelve men to the Moon, and then never go back. Starting with President Nixon, funding for space exploration was cut again and again, and throughout the 70s and 80s, the American space program managed to accomplish something I would have thought impossible: they made space exploration boring. Science fiction writer Jerry Pournelle once said: "I always knew I'd see the first man on the Moon. I never dreamed I'd see the last." We continued to explore the solar system, but with unmanned remote probes.** Americans lost interest in space, and I gave up all hope of ever getting into space, because I felt, even if it happens in my lifetime, I'll be too old to go. Like most SF fans of my age, I had always wanted to go into space, if only once, just to say I had been there.

So what's changed? **The Hubble** has proven so successful that people are thinking about space again. Americans are looking for something to get behind to take their minds of current events. There's a certain amount of nostalgia about the space program, and the possibility of life on Mars looks better than at any point in recent history. Mainly, I think the fact that the Chinese are beginning to get involved in space has shocked many of us— Americans tend to believe that space is their private preserve (despite considerable evidence to the contrary).

In 2014, I'll be 63. If a pilot on the initial flight can be 63, there is a pretty good chance that passengers on regular flights could be that age also. A lot can happen in ten years. There is serious talk of commercial space tourism, and renewed interest in manned exploration of Mars and the Moon, both on the part of the current president and private industry.

To bring this back to **Traveller**—one of the concerns over the future history was that reality was not moving along fast enough to achieve the results chronicled in the game's future history. With all these things to spur us on, Maybe we'll make it after all.

We almost had a theme issue this time . . . if I could have come up with one more stowaway-related article, we could have. If you like, just have Bobby and Zee both stowaway on the starship crewed by the subjects of the 25-point **NPC** article!

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* Not that there's anything wrong with that. **The Cassini Mission** is sending back some great stuff as I write.

Jul 19, 2004, Some Thoughts on the Last Poll

Last issue's poll was "Which social science do you think is most useful to a **Traveller** GM?" The results were not entirely unpredictable: history came in first by a vast margin over the second-place winner, cultural anthropology, with economics, sociology, and political science following well behind the first two.

I say it is not unpredictable for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was a similar poll taken by an SF list a few years ago (I have forgotten the name of the list and the details), where the response indicated that the vast majority of SF readers indicated that history was their strongest secondary interest. A couple of years ago, I ran a **JTAS** poll that confirmed these numbers (you can look it up in the past poll results).

Predicting future events from past ones is one of the foundations of science fiction—and the foundation of fields as diverse as economic theory, stock market investment, and meteorology. A more recent trend in science fiction has been the "alternate history," which can sometimes take such extreme forms as (to mention one popular example) "What if aliens invaded during WWII?"

History, of course, can mean recent history as well as events from hundreds or thousands of years ago (what my 7th grade teachers called "current events"). Many GMs have created campaigns based on a futuristic version of the post WWII "Cold War"—following the lead of SF writers too numerous to mention. GMs (like SF authors) look to the past because it is real. It actually happened, and thus it can be mined for "bits of business" to make fictional situations seem real.

Just as history can be used by the GM, a study of what college students in my day called "Soc-Anthro"—sociology and anthropology—can yield great dividends. Players are familiar with how their own culture works, so in order to expose them to something different, it is necessary to look at less-common cultures around the world or in the past. Several GMs have used situations like the Micronesian "Cargo Cult" that arose during and shortly after WWII as inspiration for a campaign situation.* The inhabitants of Egypt under the Pharaohs certainly viewed their government in a radically different way than we do. Law for a 9th century Anglo-Saxon was a vastly different thing than it is for me (look up weregeld for an example). Men of my great-grandfather's generation wore shirts that had detachable collars, cuffs, and sleeves (two out of three of these items were made of celluloid plastic, for stiffness). Men of my father's generation would no more leave the house without a hat than they would without their shoes.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* I leave the location of the **JTAS** articles dealing with this subject as an exercise for the reader.

Aug 02, 2004, Playing with Language

Before getting to the subject of this issue's editorial musing,* I'd like to announce the winners of the first **JTAS** "A**dventure Soup**" contest:

Stuart Driver (**Scavenger Hunt**),
Samuel W. Quier (**Out of the Darkness**), and
Richard Weissler (**Fahrenheit Minus Four Fifty-one**).

It was a tough job choosing between the entries, and since the contest rules didn't require me to designate a first, second, or third position, I didn't. Congratulations to the

winners, and my thanks to everyone who contributed. Stuart's article appears this time, the rest will follow in future issues.

One of the more interesting background features of Joss Whedon's **Firefly** was the use of Mandarin. Part of the background history was that America and China were the two leading societies in space after Earth that was got "used up," and practically everyone spoke Mandarin in addition to English. There were many signs of a broadly mixed culture in the show, especially in the set dressing, the costumes, and in the props, but the sprinkling of Mandarin into the dialogue (with rare exceptions, it was used in place of swearing and for excited exclamations) leapt out especially. Those interested in translations should exercise their skill at search engines: a few seconds search provided this.

I found it added a degree of believability to the show, and other fans have expressed similar sentiments. In my case, it added to the "perceived realism" of the show—it made things seem more realistic from a societal and cultural point of view. It also de-emphasized the "Yanks in Space" aspect of the show, which I'm sure non-American viewers found desirable. The sprinkling of non-English words and phrases added an almost indefinable something to the dialogue. Even if you (like most fans) don't speak Mandarin, it was fairly clear from context what was being said most of the time.

GMs and players interested in adding a similar cachet to their **Traveller** games can do so easily, and it needn't be Mandarin—any language would work just as well. Pepper your games with exclamations in German, Greek, Finnish, Esperanto, even Klingon or Tolkien's Elvish. You need not use actual profanities, especially if using a language listeners might understand. You could even create your own, or use one of the alien languages created for **Traveller**. Of this last group, I think Vilani has the best in-game justification, and it has the advantage that no official Vilani to Galanglic dictionary has been published. Decide on some suitable phrases, generate the words and go to it. There are many word generators out there that automate the process—here's one to get you started, you can find many others on the web. The main thing to make sure of is that everyone can pronounce the words you generate—frustration will result otherwise.

I only wish I'd thought of this back when I GMed.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* I'll discuss the "hard science" poll next issue.

Aug 16, 2004, Degree Optional, Imagination Required

First, readers please note that this issue's **Short Adventure Out of the Darkness** by Samuel Quier, is the second winner of the **Adventure Stew** contest.

Next, some remarks on the "hard sciences" poll:

The question was: "Which hard science do you think is most useful to a **Traveller** GM?" and the top answer (38%) was physics—no surprise there. Planetology followed (24%), and a number of people wrote me to say they had voted for planetology assuming it included geology or the non-terrestrial equivalent thereof. Personally, I am not on solid ground when it comes to the hard sciences. I had zoology, physics, and chemistry classes in high school, and was a biology minor in college, so my knowledge is somewhat greater than the average American's, but I do not consider myself proficient in any of them. I never took a formal astronomy course, and my acquaintance with the science is limited to what I managed to pick up from a couple of friends who are buffs.* I had some geology in college and a smattering of other courses here and there, but the bulk of my hard science

knowledge comes from non-school related reading—primarily Isaac Asimov's non-fiction works, **Scientific American**, and the **Cartoon Guide to Physics** (which I've found helpful in restoring what the passage of time has deleted from my brain). My main problem with the "hard" sciences has been a fundamental lack of ability in mathematics. Outside of the basic four functions, I am pretty much helpless, and this puts me at a distinct disadvantage.

Over the years, I've met countless **Traveller** fans. While the vast majority of them have had some college, and a good many of those hold advanced degrees of one sort or another. However, many don't, and I consider that significant. I am proof that you don't need a Ph.D. to play **Traveller** (I have a B.S. in History, and was a thesis short of a Masters when I gave up on graduate school.

To my mind, what this demonstrates is not the depths of my ignorance of the hard sciences, but that you needn't have advanced degrees in chemical engineering, astrophysics, and calculus to play, GM, and enjoy **Traveller**. All you need is imagination and a voracious appetite for reading.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* This came in handy a couple of times, particularly when **Halley's Comet** came visiting. **Comet Halley** wasn't very impressive in the early stages, and a telescope (combined with the knowledge of where to point it) added greatly to my enjoyment of the event. They were also useful when I needed astronomical advice for use in **Traveller** or another game— I can't tell a red dwarf from a green giant.

Aug 30, 2004, A Matter of Style

First, I must announce that Richard Weissler's contest winning entry, **Fahrenheit Minus Four Fifty-One**, has been delayed until next issue. I hope the readers will be satisfied instead with Paul Drye's latest essay, **Deep Past, Deep Future**, in which he examines an alien world.

On to the main topic: my likes and dislikes in adventures. I feel this is a matter of interest to most **Traveller** players and GMs because my **Traveller** designs reflect (sometimes unconsciously) the sort of adventures I like. I doubt that anyone who has studied the body of my work closely over the years will not be surprised by some of what follows, but for you relative newcomers, here goes:

My first character* was a veteran of the army. At the time of the first **Traveller** playtest, the Third Imperium didn't exist, although Frank (who was refereeing the first playtests) had an empire as part of the nebulous campaign background. The adventures I enjoyed most reflected the pervading interest of the **GDW** staff in wargames and military history. Our adventuring group had no starship (in the initial stages . . . the ship construction rules were still under development when we started playtest). The adventures fell into several general types.

Bodyguard/Escort Missions: These usually involved acting as a security force for some NPC patron who wanted to make a trip to a hazardous area. Once, we escorted an indolent nobleman's son and a party of his hangers-on on a hunting trip to a world with a large wilderness area. It also had an active resistance movement—a fact that the local government took some pains to cover up. Another mission involved an archeological expedition in search of alien artifacts (this was before the Ancients had been created) which just happened to be sought by a rival group with criminal connections.

Shipboard: These took place after we had acquired a ship, and involved our testing out

the trading system as well as refining the close combat system. During this period, we carried normal cargos (which we found kind of dull after a while), "special" cargos that needed armed protection. Eventually, hijackers and pirates reared their ugly heads—as a means of generating low-level combats (eventually the basis of the boardgame **Snapshot**).

Mysteries: After a time, we began to explore the possibilities of more intellectual, less combat oriented adventures, like the one that eventually became **Murder on Arcturus Station.** I found these interesting to play, but tough to create, which is why I wrote so few of them.

In general, I found it most interesting to play adventures that reflected the style of the science fiction literature I read during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. This was dominated by the works of Isaac Asimov (primarily the original **Foundation Trilogy**), David Drake, Jerry Pournelle, Andre Norton (the merchant stories and military stories like **Star Guard**), Gordon R. Dickson (the **Dorsai Series**), and Poul Anderson (primarily the **Solar Spice & Liquors/Nicholas Van Rijn Series**). In the game, I have tried to recreate the works of literature I most enjoyed reading. Other **Traveller** authors have done the same, and it is significant, I think, that the Third Imperium is firmly rooted in the kind of SF that we enjoyed reading. Marc, Frank, and the others had read different works, so we had a wider variety of sources than my list.

The problem is, I think that more and more readers of SF are not acquainted with the literature we read, and find the game strangely archaic. I think this is an excellent topic for another discussion, perhaps as soon as next issue.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Henson Stringfellow, for those looking for questions in the next game of **Traveller Trivial Pursuit**.

Sep 12, 2004, Archaic?

First of all, the third of the adventure contest winners appears this issue: Richard Weissler's **Fahrenheit Minus Four Fifty-One**. I hope everyone enjoyed the contest, and we will run another one soon.

Last issue, I said: "The problem is, I think that more and more readers of SF are not acquainted with the literature we read, and find the game strangely archaic. I think this is an excellent topic for another discussion, perhaps as soon as next issue."

This topic provoked a lengthy thread on the **JTAS** discussion boards, and it is all worth reading, but I thought I'd add a few comments of my own.

The original **Traveller** did not include provision for **MEMS** (nanotechnology) because, when the game was first written, it was little more than a group of esoteric "cocktail party" speculations. I have discussed **GURPS Traveller** and **MEMS** on pp. GT:14-15. Eric Drexler (in **The Engines of Creation**, published in 1981) inspired a number of SF writers, but by that time, the official background had already been established. **GDW** decided to leave the universe more or less as it was (although we considered using MEMS as the basis for the virus in **Traveller: The New Era**). The ideas outlined by Drexler would make a good basis for a game (indeed, this was the plan for the **Digest Group**'s last game, **A.I.**), but that game wouldn't be the **Traveller** we all know and love.

Cybertech was around as a concept well before **Traveller** (the TV series **Six Million Dollar Man** for one), but the staff at **GDW** decided to minimize this sort of thing in the game (although it was included in **2300 AD** later).

Traveller was originally intended to allow recreation of a wide variety of SF genres, but consumers soon demanded an official background, and **GDW** give it to them. Had the company continued, one of the things that was planned was to expand the rules for **Traveller: The New Era** to include different technological assumptions. At first, the plan was to adapt **2300 AD, Space: 1889, Dark Conspiracy**, and other **GDW** lines to use the "house rules," but the long term plan was to do a number of different SF and even horror backgrounds.

One of the genres I was especially anxious to do was a "time patrol" sort of thing, but I had what I believe was an interesting twist (perhaps I'll go into that sometime). The point is, **GDW** was on the way to expanding the genres covered by our "house system," which was descended from the **Traveller** rules.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Sep 27, 2004, Critters, Part I

As many of you may know, I was a biology minor in college. One of **Traveller'**s more innovative features was the system for dealing with animals. A few reviewers mentioned it, and one singled it out for special comment. The problem facing **Traveller** was how to describe alien, non-Terran animals in a consistent way. John Harshman proposed that instead of trying to describe each creature individually, we should classify them by the ecological niche that each filled, and work out some general behaviors for each. We ended up with a system that met the gaming requirements very nicely, but a few players still found it unsatisfying.

Why? Because it did not describe the animals. The players wanted to be able to picture what was chewing on their ankle, goring their abdomen, or trying to swallow them whole. GMs were left up to their own devices when the group encountered a carnivore pouncer (for example), and even the most imaginative gamemasters are not up to creating the hundreds of animals necessary for an extended campaign. This is why, when the print version of **JTAS** was first published, that Bestiary was one of the first and most popular article types. Bush runners, tree krakens, bloodvarks, kians, and dozens of others were described and detailed.

The problem, of course, is that most people aren't biology majors, and are not fully acquainted with the diversity of life on Earth, let alone all the possible forms that it could conceivably take on other worlds. GMs (and designers) tend to draw inspiration from the large, dangerous animals we are familiar with as Paul Drye mentioned in a previous article. Lions and tigers and bears, as Dorothy says in **The Wizard of OZ**. Looking to invertebrates for inspiration (as Paul suggests) is a valid approach—the variety of body forms is pretty vast, even on Earth, especially if you look to other epochs (do a web search for *Hallucigenia* or Tully Monster* for examples. The square-cube law (I hope I don't have to explain that here) causes minor problems with many of the stranger body forms—what works perfectly in a creature only a few millimeters long is not feasible in something a few orders of magnitude larger. Enlarge an ant to the size of a lion, and it would have trouble living for more than a few minutes before its respiratory and circulatory systems proved fatally inadequate.

I hope it is not necessary for me to dismiss the "random" method of animal creation—as used in so many fantastic creatures—select a random assortment of body parts and glue them together with rhyme or reason.

Creating the description of the animal is only the first step, however. While a description will work for most readers, others want pictures, and this means you have to bring an

artist into the equation. If the artist is familiar with the biological sciences (like William H. Keith or Liz Danforth, for example), and has talent (ditto), you can get an illustration that will match almost exactly what is in your mind's eye.

What the animal looks like is only part of the process, of course. Large, fierce animals are fairly uncommon in any reasonable ecology, occupying the top of the food chain pyramid as they do. A world inhabited entirely by velociraptors is biologically as ludicrous as an economy where everyone makes a living by doing each other's laundry. The original **Traveller** system created an animal to fit a slot in a ecosystem that formed a coherent whole. Adventurers were more likely to run into herbivores than carnivores, and smaller animals more often than larger ones.

My interest in biology has meant that I have created (or helped to create) more than my fair share of the critters (sophonts and otherwise) in **Traveller.** I think the vast majority of them are reasonable creations that fit into their environment. I never had a creature that lived its entire life in a 10' square underground room, standing behind the door waiting to ambush whoever entered.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I mention the Tully Monster because it was the official fossil of the state of Illinois, where I was born (not many states have an official fossil—that I know of anyway). The reconstruction by the **Illinois State Museum** is very strange-looking, although the actual fossil looks kind of like a squashed banana.

Oct 11, 2004, Critters, Part II

I'm adding this first paragraph Sunday, after spending Saturday at **LinuCon** here in Austin. Guests included web cartoonist Howard Tayler (whom I've met before) and Wil Wheaton (who I met for the first time at the show). I could only attend on Saturday (and, technically, part of Sunday), and spent most of the time helping run **Evil Stevie's Pirate Game** which was great fun, albeit rather tiring (I took upon myself the task of running the sharks and other sea creatures (including a mosasaur) attracted by the dozens of little plastic corpses floating on the surface of the carpet . . . er . . . water). I missed seeing Wil cut a swath of destruction in Frag, but I saw him win at **Spooks**.

Anyway, on to the main event: more thoughts on animals in **Traveller**, this time concerning ecosystems:

Animals (and plants) don't live in a vacuum (well, not usually anyway—that's a topic for another discussion)—they are usually part of a larger ecosystem, and play a vital role therein. As a general principle, the total amount of living matter in a system is called "biomass" and the largest part of the biomass consists of organisms that can extract nourishment (and energy) from the environment around them. Some organisms get their energy/nutrients from other organisms. Oversimplifying a lot of concepts, the stuff that gets eaten tends to be less numerous than the stuff that eats it, a concept explored in a great deal more detail in **Why Big Fierce Animals Are Rare: An Ecologist's Perspective** by Paul A. Colinvaux. In general terms, in any given ecosystem there tends to be a whole passel of plant-type biomass, a goodly bunch of plant-eating biomass, and comparatively little plant-eater biomass. A given quantity of grass can only support a limited number of buffalo, which can only support so many wolves.

The critters that are of interest to an adventurers tend to be things that are large, have things like claws and saber teeth, and that try to eat them or have horns and hooves and try

to trample or otherwise inconvenience them. For this reason, the encounter tables in **Traveller** do not reflect a completely realistic view of the ecosystem (or the food chain), and have to be adjusted. The players would soon tire of encounters with the otherworldly equivalent of grass and fruit flies.* Well-constructed tables should have a few "food" animals for "survival" situations where the group needs to hunt in order to eat, but should not be loaded with "useless" (from the game point of view) animals.

On the rare occasions when I used to referee games, I did not use an encounter table—I had notes on the interesting animal and plant life of the area where the adventure took place, and when the adventurers had an encounter, I picked one that seemed to advance (or retard) the plot at that point. I also let the players know their characters would have numerous encounters with things, and I would only let them know if these were significant. For example, if the group was wandering through a bug-infested marsh, I'd tell them they would be having encounters with annoying/blood- sucking/stinging/biting things that were not important to the big picture, so I wouldn't waste time dealing with them. "Just imagine yourselves slapping and scratching at things every so often." I'd say. Of course, when the crocs showed up, I drew that to their attention.

I do not recommend this for everyone—GMs who aren't as interested in biology as I am will often prefer tables. It also requires players who trust you and your judgment, but frankly, if the players don't trust your judgment, they probably shouldn't be playing in your games, should they?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Some of the original **Traveller** adventures and **JTAS** bestiaries tried to add a little additional perceived realism by counting a swarm of small insect-like creatures as a single "encounter"—under the assumption that a few tens of kilograms of swarming "no-see-'ems" were equivalent to an attack by a single multi-kilo critter.

Oct 25, 2004, I Don't Get it, Part II

In a previous editorial, I discussed a few bits of fan behavior that I fail to understand on a gut level (although I grasp the arguments intellectually). This time, I propose to examine a pair of fan behaviors for which I don't even have an intellectual understanding:

Alternatives: For some reason, a great many fans are not interested in a game setting that does not take place in our own universe. This is not true of the majority of fans, but the number is a significant portion of the total. I first ran into this obsession when I was line manager for **GDW's Twilight: 2000** and we began to close in on the earliest dates of our game "future." When we decided to clean up the mechanics, and revise the rules,* we created a diversion point for the future history. After that, we would not have to continually revise the background history of the game. It would simply be an alternate world, and out future history could proceed unchanged. The majority of **Twilight: 2000** fans did not complain (many wrote to express agreement with our approach), but a sizable group didn't like it. Many people wrote to say how the fact that the game now took place in an alternate universe (almost all used some variant on "fictional" universe) had either caused their gaming group to lose interest or to stop playing the game entirely. This is a complete mystery to me. In 1987, I certainly hoped that the world of the year 2000 we depicted in the game never came about—something about the end of civilization has always bothered me (I like indoor plumbing, hot water, and electric lights). What difference does it make that a given RPG's background is not the same universe that we live in now?

Granted, there seem to be few people who have this complaint with **Traveller**—I have never encountered any, in fact. SF gamers seem to be more tolerant of alternatives than other types of gamers.

Randomization in Character Generation: The earliest RPGs used dice to generate characteristics, but soon the "point allocation" type of mechanics were developed. **GDW** used the random system in some of our games and allocation in others. Frankly, I find myself leaning towards more control over my characters (although I do not go to the lengths that some people do to gain maximum advantage in my characters). I am not a pure role-player in that I prefer to run certain types of characters. I find little pleasure in running characters outside of my interests, and the idea of having little or no control over my characters is a little annoying to me.

People tell me "But isn't it fun to take what nature gives you and do the best possible with it?" and I have to answer "No, not very." Even the first few RPGs I played, the referee allowed players to roll several characters and choose the one they liked best.

As I mentioned in my previous editorial on the subject, I mean no insult to people who hold these opinions, and I do not propose to try to change them. Differing tastes are what make the world the fun place it is.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, JTAS

* This is itself was a matter of some small controversy—we had fans who preferred the first version of the rules. Frankly, I preferred the first version of the automatic fire rules, but I liked the other changes. I wrote some of them myself, so this is hardly surprising.

Nov 08, 2004, Games to Come

Many years ago, I read a novel by Andre Norton called The Time Traders.* With my interest in history and SF, I naturally devoured all the time travel stories I could find in the small library where I grew up, but this one was special because it had a scene in it describing something else I was interested in—games.

I became interested in games about 1960 or so. During the centennial of the American Civil War (1961-1965 for those of you who can't do the math), there was considerable examination of the conflict in the media. This included **Life Magazine**, which devoted many pages to the subject. Among those was a game called **1863**. Designed by the editors of **Life,** and later published as a boxed game by **Parker Brothers**, the game was my first introduction to what could be called wargaming, and captured my interest. It was overly simplistic, and represented only the year 1863 (hence the name), but it covered land and even naval actions (there were three Union gunboat counters—one for the Mississippi River and two for the Atlantic . . . I think there were two Confederate gunboat counters). My friends and I played the magazine version (you cut the pieces out and pasted them to cardboard) until the pieces wore out, and begged our parents to buy us the boxed version for Christmas.

I later discovered other boardgames on a variety of subjects (**Risk**, for example, and the many **Avalon Hill** boardgames), but they were soon superseded by miniatures games—where miniatures (aka "toy") soldiers are maneuvered over a tabletop amidst model scenery. Even this was a pale imitation of what Ms. Norton came up with as a recreation for her time-travelling agents:

One of the throwaway scenes in the book had three of the characters play a game. A wargame, and one that boggled my young imagination, because it was three dimensional, and projected on a playing surface like a hologram (although that word did not exist when

the book was written). The players manipulated the controls by voice, and maneuvered their fighters in an action that ranged over miles of scale territory and took several hours. I wanted one then, and I still do.

Several decades later, several friends and I were speculating where the combination of computers and gaming would lead, and we decided that the ultimate miniatures game would be where the base of each stand would contain a chip, and the table would sense where it was somehow. You could move the stands of miniature soldiers by hand, and the table would tell you when you had moved too far for that turn, or when you were trying to traverse impassable terrain. It would adjudicate combats and tell you which casualties to remove.** We eventually gave up on such dreaming—after all, computer chips will never be that cheap in our lifetimes.

RFID chips, of course, are now so cheap that people are starting to talk about putting them in candy bar wrappers, and magnetic-encoded strips can now be printed on card-stock. The local bus system now issues bus transfers on small cards, which expire after a couple of hours and can be thrown away. Each bus can print them and read ones issued by other buses.

How far away are we from a card game, where the tabletop senses the play of each card, remembers the rules, adjudicates each hand/round, and keep score? Steve Jackson thinks five years (it came up in conversation a short time ago).

I think we may be a little farther away from the dream miniatures game. As for Ms. Norton's set-up, some would argue that computer games can give us everything but the 3D tabletop now. Virtual reality games, where the players actually participate in the action in all five senses (**Star Trek's** holodeck) are a bit farther along, I think. I probably won't be able to afford them anyway, if the prices of miniature figures keep rising.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The book was recently "updated" for a modern audience—a process for which I have some misgivings.

**We imagined miniatures instead of holographic images, because painting and modifying the minis themselves is a sizable chunk of the fun—your mileage may vary.

Nov 22, 2004, The Scope of Traveller

One of the features of **Traveller** that makes it so enduring (and fascinating) is its multifaceted nature. In addition to being a role-playing game,* **Traveller** can be a tabletop miniatures wargame, a tactical-level strategic space combat game, a strategic (and even grand strategic) interstellar wargame, an interstellar macro-economic simulation, and a toolkit for the construction of everything from handguns, vehicles, spacecraft, cities, societies, worlds, and star systems. Few other games undertake this range of subject matter, and almost none carry it to the level **Traveller** does.

Traveller, like all RPGs, had its roots in wargaming. The creators of **D&D** and other early RPGs were almost all wargamers, and the first RPG market was among wargamers. The designers of **Traveller** were all wargamers and wargame designers. Practically every RPG ever published contains a system (often several) for the resolution of combat between characters, and those that do not usually have game mechanics for the resolution of inter-character conflict. **Traveller** is unique, in my experience, among RPGs in the number of board and miniatures wargames that are considered part of the background to the game (**Fifth Frontier War, Invasion Earth, Dark Nebula, Striker,** and **Azhanti High Lightning**,

to name five right off the top of my head).

Over the years, there have been many science fiction RPGs—for many years, it was the second most popular genre for RPGs after fantasy. Very few of SF RPGs approach **Traveller**'s scope or depth of detail. Almost none have as fully developed a background as **Traveller.**

It comes as a surprise to neophytes that one can play **Traveller** without ever generating a character. **Traveller** fans can spend months doing nothing but designing and creating bits of background—starships, vehicles of every size and description, starports, worlds, planetary systems, and star systems. There are long-time **Traveller** players who have never taken part in conventional adventures. Instead, these people play the role of statesmen or military commanders, directing huge governmental bodies in the pursuit of military or political gain.

This was intentional, almost from the beginning. Marc realized that **Traveller** fans, in many cases, might have trouble finding others to play with on a regular basis, and set out to convince people that it was possible to play the game solitaire until one could find other like-minded individuals. Marc told people that they could spend their time creating characters (ostensibly for later use as NPCs in adventures), starships, worlds, subsectors, and sectors. Preparing to play the game was playing the game.

Another inspiration was the notion that players could not only be part of an adventuring group, but that they could be admirals, generals, and heads of state. Games such as **Fifth Frontier War, Trillion Credit Squadron,** and **Pocket Empires** (the latter published by **Imperium Games**) allowed players to run fleets or even a small interstellar polity in conflict with others.

The notion that a role-playing game could incorporate so many diverse threads is one of the things that has kept the game alive all these years. I think it was one of Marc's greatest inspirations, and one which has received little notice.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are people who claim that **Traveller** is not an RPG . . . these same people will tell you that **GDW** never produced a true RPG. I won't go into the arguments here, but I will say that I find the notion risible.

Dec 06, 2004, Background

A few of the responses to the last poll noted that after playing, reading the background was their favorite

Traveller-related activity. This comes as no surprise to me, but it did cause me to reflect on the subject of backgrounds in RPGs.

Over the years, I have come to believe that setting and background are vital components to a successful RPG. I have had my hand in four successful RPGs—T**raveller, Twilight: 2000, 2300 AD,** and **Space: 1889,** all of which are still available in facsimile reprint editions at a minimum. In each of these games, the development of the game background was a major factor (if not the most important factor) in each game's success.

In the early days, role-playing games had no backgrounds—not in the present sense anyway—only a kind of general fantasy/medieval background. **GDW**'s first RPG was *En Garde*, and that one had no real background either, just the history of France as novelized in Dumas' **The Three Musketeers**. By the time we created **Traveller**, the first campaigns for other RPGs were being created. **D&D** had **Blackmoor and Greyhawk**, for example. Our

original intention with **Traveller** was to not have any specific background history. Instead, we planned on allowing individual GMs to create their own, and we would supply them with supplemental products like **1001 Characters and Animal Encounters.** It rapidly became apparent, however, that consumers wanted an "official" **Traveller** background, and we began to supply one. Sales skyrocketed. More than 25 years later, **Traveller** has one of the most fully-developed backgrounds of any RPG—one which rivals the backgrounds of some SF and fantasy novel series.

At first, there was no "master plan" for the background, other than Marc's overall vision and Frank's rough outline as presented in the original **Emperor's of the Third Imperium** list. One original plan for a product line would have made **Traveller** part of a large line of RPGs, set in different historical eras and literary milieus. This was soon abandoned in favor of "getting **Traveller** off the ground," while **GDW** continued to produce board wargames (some of them with SF themes) and tabletop miniatures rules. The development of the **Traveller** background proceeded by fits and starts as we published products. It was not until several years after **Traveller**'s initial publication that we had a coherent plan for where the game was going. An early experiment in background was the lead-in to the **Fifth Frontier War.** We set up the frontier with the Zhodani, created a history of conflict, and used news reports in the **TNS** column in the print version of **JTAS** to gradually, over several years, guide the game to the start of the war, and to the release of the **Fifth Frontier War** board game. We would do the same thing again in leading up to the release of **Secret of the Ancients.**

GDW's experience with the **Traveller** background would enable us to create more integrated backgrounds for later games. In the creation of **Twilight: 2000, 2300 AD,** and **Space: 1889** for example, the background was one of the first things we worked out, and repaid our efforts many time over by making additions to the line vastly easier.

Planning and preparation pay off, even when you're making things up.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Dec 19, 2004, Information and Games

In most games, the adventure hinges on certain bits of information. You need to find out the way through the Swamps of Madness to Castle Anthrax, there to ask the Monks of Karma for the location of the Tower of Suparip, where is kept the Golden Chain of Nimru-Din, of the ten thousand golden links, so they can bring it to the **Wizard of Oz**, and on and on, wa-de-do-dah. The players are generally OK with this—it's the way games are normally played. You travel for months of game time over hundreds or thousands of miles in search of knowledge.

In SF games, the players consider themselves ill-used if they can't go to the nearest computer (preferably one on their person) and search the interstellar internet for LANDSAT photos, building blueprints, surveillance videos, and step-by-step instructions on how to overcome the security system of wherever they're supposed to go. **Traveller** is slightly different.

Traveller players relish (and revel in) the kind of data a census would be looking for—if census takers interviewed stars, planets, and planetoids as well as sophonts. On a **Traveller** discussion list, one of the participants bemoaned the fact that none of the original creators of the game was an economist. I never managed to learn why, but I gather it was after trying to come up with Imperium-wide economic data. I'm not sure why such data is needed, unless the person's characters seriously intended to travel to all 11,000 worlds in

search of something to buy.

The original version of the game assumed, for simplicity, that each star had only one significant world. This proved inadequate even before we were done with playtesting, however, and Marc began assembling information on stellar types and how to randomly create reasonably realistic star systems. The first iteration of this was presented in **Scouts**, the sixth book of rules for the system, and that product became incredibly popular, despite the simple nature of the system (and it's numerous technical flaws).

The reason for this is simple. The whole point of **Traveller** is to explore, and a single starport on a single world was limiting. Players wanted their characters to be able to call up holographic displays of the Imperium, zoom in on sectors and subsectors, then individual systems, then continents, cities, neighborhoods, buildings, and room layouts. They revel in comparative analysis of fictional societies, militaries, governments and economies, in so-called "data mining."* As I mentioned in a previous editorial, Marc felt that number crunching was a valuable part of the game, since so much material had to be generated in order to play out a reasonable campaign, and encouraged players to such pursuits when they could not actually play.

Traveller remains a rarity—a game where a computer is an almost necessary tool (you can play the game without one—I've done it), instead of an optional accessory. One of the reasons the UWP (universal world profile) and it's ilk were created was to make it easier for players to create computer databases for their game materials.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I've never had two people give me the same definition of "data mining"—they usually mean spending hours on end staring at spreadsheets and columns of figures. I had enough of that kind of thing in my Historical Statistics classes in college (but instead of computerized spreadsheets, we used to use paper and pencils). Statistical historians were once derisively called "cannon counters" by their less mathematically-inclined fellows, and the term persists, even though the number crunching approach to history has become easier with the availability of computer programs.

2005

2005

Jan 03, 2005, A Matter of Scale

Recently, while watching an episode of **Stargate: SG-1**, it occurred to me that one of the problems with the series (albeit a minor one—I like the series a great deal, and I think it is some of the best SF to be found on television) is that the scale is out of whack. I don't mean that the Stargate needs to be bigger (although that wouldn't hurt), I mean that the number of personnel involved is one or two orders of magnitude too small to be 100% believable.

For those of you not acquainted with the series, the premise is that the United States Air Force has managed to lay hands on a means of interstellar travel (the Stargate), and has formed a special organization to use it for exploration. Early on, the explorers discover a hostile alien species, and the race is on to try to find advanced worlds who will ally with Earth against the Bad Guys (or at least find some hi-tech toys we can use against them). Exploration is carried out by numbered teams (SG-4, SG-9, etc.) of which the preeminent one is SG-1. SG-1 is used as a "team-of-all-work" by the USAF: first contact, diplomacy, commando raids, scientific research, and so on.

My main quibble with this is that **SG-1** consists of four people: the Steely-jawed hero, the soft science geek, the attractive-and-highly-competent female hard science geek, and the combat monster. If I were setting something like this up in the so-called "real world," I'd want a small team (perhaps a dozen or so) for "first in" missions,* supplemented by several specialist groups consisting of twenty to thirty members for the follow-up stuff—diplomacy, trade negotiations, technological exchanges, etc.

Naturally, there are two very good reasons why there are so few people in **SG-1**—the constraints of a television series budget, and the dramatic necessity of the adventure show format. Producers don't want a cast of dozens because television budgets are limited, and shows like **Stargate: SG-1** need to save the bucks for special effects and the occasional special guest star. The small band of heroes has to solve this week's problem and get everything neatly tied- up before the final credits.

It occurred to me recently that **Traveller** did much the same thing, although for different reasons. When the game was first published in 1977, the initial adventures involved small groups, usually two to four player characters. The ships were smaller, the adventures limited to what could be played to conclusion in an evening or two. It was not feasible for one player to control dozens of characters—at least it wasn't much fun. The games we (the designers) liked best involved small numbers of characters, because it was hard to get more than four people together to play.

I've always liked games that ran at these lower, less intense levels. I prefer adventuring in smaller groups because it seems more interesting from a dramatic standpoint, even though it may be less realistic.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Actually, I'd use a remote-piloted vehicle for the first time through the gate—something the series does also, but it is usually downplayed. RPVs are not very exciting to the average television series viewer.

Jan 17, 2005, Changes

First off, I'd be remiss in my duties if I didn't point out the cool pictures from Titan sent

back by Huygens. Go ESA!

Traveller fans tend to be interested in technology and technological advances. One of **Traveller**'s features is the variation of technological advancement from place to place in the **OTU (Official Traveller Universe)**. The twin foundations of modern medicine are anesthesia and antisepsis, both of which were developed in the 19th Century. Although discovered within a generation of each other,* anesthesia was adopted almost immediately, but antisepsis lagged behind, for social and cultural reasons.

The reasons behind the almost immediate and universal acceptance of anesthesia are fairly clear—surgeons were (mostly) humane. Before anesthesia, the surgeon was under pressure to finish as quickly as possible, so as to minimize a patient's suffering. Operations had to be kept simple and finished quickly, before pain and shock caused more damage than the surgery was trying to correct. Anesthesia relieved pain and meant that surgeons could take their time and do a better job. The benefits were readily apparent to everyone, and anesthetic technique spread rapidly.

Unfortunately (for the patients) anesthesia also meant they could operate longer, and expose patients to greater risk of infection.

Antisepsis and antiseptic surgical techniques were slower to be adopted. Unlike anesthesia, the benefits of sterile technique were not immediately apparent. Surgeons were not immediately convinced that they should stop operating in the clothes they wore on the street, and that their instruments should be sterilized between operations (after all, not every patient succumbed to infection). Those interested in the full details can find them in James Burkes' **The Day the Universe Changed.**

Traveller fans are used to the present day, when advances are adopted instantaneously (or nearly so). Most of us have become accustomed to change, and some of us have come to expect it. In the SF genres from which the OTU was drawn, worlds often have differing levels of technological development. Writers such as Isaac Asimov and Andre Norton exploited these differences for atmosphere and for plot elements, and **Traveller** does so too.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Anesthesia was discovered in the 1840s, antisepsis in the 1860s—approximately.

Jan 30, 2005, Two Cultures

In 1959, British scientist and author C. P. Snow wrote **The Two Cultures**, describing the notion that society is split between two cultures—the arts and humanities on one side and the sciences on the other. Snow's observation that the two "cultures" were increasingly unable to communicate with each other inspired musical comedians Flanders and Swann to create a short routine about communicating with scientists* as well as their song T**he First and Second Laws,** which set the laws of thermodynamics to a jazz beat ("Heat can't pass from a colder to a hotter—you can try it if you like, but you really shouldn't oughta!").

Seriously, however: nearly fifty years later, Snow's arguments seem somewhat dated, but many people think his concerns are still valid, saying that American society is increasingly split into rich/poor and tech savvy/tech ignorant segments that overlap considerably. Some hold that the world is rapidly dividing into a rich, technological half and a poor, nontechnological half.

Shortly after Snow's views were published, SF writer Isaac Asimov wrote a short essay in which he said that the split certainly existed during his academic days, and accused the arts/humanities "crowd" of a double standard. Everyone was expected to be well-grounded

in literature and the fine arts, but the reverse was not the case.** Asimov suggested that everyone in both camps needed at least a nodding acquaintance with the other side, and suggested that science fiction could serve as a bridge between the two cultures, because it drew readers from both the arts and the sciences.

The designers of **Traveller** always felt that the game had an educational side. For reasons that have been discussed before, **Traveller** has attracted more than it's share of science-oriented fans, but also has no small number of the other "culture" (a recent complaint on the **TML** was that no designer of **Traveller** had a degree in economics). One of last year's polls revealed a very large percentage of gifbin/ readers were interested in history and considered it the most important "soft" science in playing **Traveller.** In any given gathering of **Traveller** fans, one can find doctors, lawyers, engineers of every flavor, computer professionals (again of various flavors), and every other conceivable occupation and enthusiasms, with both of Snow's cultures represented. They don't seem to have much trouble communicating.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* In the interests of being understood, they suggest opening the conversation thus: "Aitch-two-ess-Oh-Four, professor! And the reciprocal of pi to your good wife . . ."
** He relates one party where the announcement that a student named Coleridge was failing English literature was greeted with chuckles by all, whereas a similar statement that a student named Gauss was failing mathematics drew reactions only from the science faculty.

Feb 13, 2005, Hiding in Plain Sight?

What I've decided to discuss this time doesn't qualify as **Designer's Notes for GT Nobles**, since I didn't cover any of these things in that book. The subject is an interesting and thought-provoking topic, but it doesn't fit in with the overall approach to the nobility that **Traveller** takes, so it could not go in. Also, it is heavily focused on American culture and society, and thus may be a bit too "*Yanks in Space*" for our non-American readers. Notwithstanding all that, it is grist for the GM's mill in their personal **Traveller** universes.

Paul Fussell, in **Class**, divided American society into nine classes,* and discussed what he called the "Touchy Subject" of class in America. One of his chapters was devoted to the higher levels of class in America, which correspond roughly to the upper levels of the Imperial nobility—the Top (out of sight) and Upper classes. Fussell divides the classes not so much by wealth but by how people behave with their money.

One of his points is that the Great Depression of the 1930s badly frightened the extremely rich. Before the 1930s, rich people flaunted their wealth, as epitomized by the mansions on upper Fifth Avenue in New York City. After the Depression, the wealthy became increasingly discreet and fled New York City for rural hideaways like upper New York State, Long Island, and Connecticut. Before the Depression (in the late 19th Century especially), the wealthy classes delighted in conspicuous public exhibitions, with dozens of servants and retainers in attendance. Afterwards, their celebrations became less conspicuous. In the present (which for Fussell was the late 1980s), the uber-wealthy hide not so much to avoid envy and class warfare, but from exposé journalists and "foundation mendicancy, with its hordes of beggars in three-piece suits constantly badgering the well-to-do." Showing off used to be the main satisfaction of the uber-rich in America . . . now it is left to "celebrities" such as actors and musicians (which Fussell classes as Upper Middle at best—money alone is not the defining factor, remember).

The important thing about money is how long the money has been in the family

(which is a subject I do touch on in GT Nobles. The Top (out of sight) people inherited it from someone who inherited it, while Upper people inherited it from someone who actually did the work to earn it.** In addition to the money, however, are the things that one inherits as well: land, houses, furnishings, flatware, silver, etc. Upper class insults are things like "She's from the sort of people who buy their silver." Or "Fellow praised my chairs! Of all the cheek!"

What is most interesting to me, however, is Fussell's discussion of the features that the Bottom (out of sight) class share with the Top (out of sight) class. Both groups are invisible, although not in the same way. Neither Tops nor Bottoms carry much actual cash on their persons. Neither care much what others think of them. It's an interesting comparison, much like the observation that the extremes of the political spectrum (far right and far left) have many things in common.

However, the notion of the upper nobility being "invisible" was not in keeping with the way we had set things up in the game. Nobles in the game are expected to "earn" their high positions in society by performing something socially useful in return. Incorporating some of Fussell's ideas, however, could add something interesting for a campaign, especially in a situation where the plot requires the adventurers to pose/interact with the Top (out of sight) class.

Loren Wiseman
Senior Editor, **JTAS**

* His labels are Top (out of sight), Upper, Upper-Middle, Middle, High-Proletarian, Mid-Proletarian, Low-Proletarian, Destitute, and Bottom (out of sight).

** The Kennedy family is a good example: Joseph P. Kennedy earned the Kennedy money (Middle), John, Robert, and Edward Kennedy inherited it from him (Upper Middle), and the current generation of Kennedys inherited it from them (Upper). Fussell's list of Top (out of sight) American families is: the Rockefellers, Pews, DuPonts, Mellons, Fords, and Vanderbilts—this was twenty years ago, of course . . . there may be additions now).

Feb 28, 2005, Department of Unanticipated Consequences

People talk about unanticipated consequences quite often. Exploring things that people don't expect to happen is a popular hobby among historians as well as science fiction writers. For example:

Historians of the Civil War talk about how railroads influenced the result. The Union advantage in rolling stock, in rolling mills for the manufacture of rails, in foundries for manufacture of engines, and in experienced personnel was a major advantage for the Union that the Confederacy was never able to overcome. Both sides learned to use the rails for transport of supplies and for troop movements, and both sides sought to disrupt the other's rail network by deep penetration raids.

However, railroads had another effect on the war that is seldom mentioned: the massive buildup of the rails in the states of the Old Northwest Territories* from 1850 to 1860. It has been said that if the war were to have started ten years earlier, it would have been vastly different. The economies of the states formed from the Northwest Territory were primarily agricultural, and were mostly wheat (corn for you foreigners living abroad)—and the market for wheat was in the large cities of the mid-Atlantic and New England states. Absent the railroads, the only viable bulk transport for wheat was on the rivers—wagons were inefficient over the distances involved (the draft animals ate the weight of the cargo after less than 100 miles) and canals were unfeasible. Riverboats could move large quantities of bulk

goods great distances using relatively little manpower—provided the rivers went where you wanted the goods to go. There were two major rivers relevant to the Northwest Territory—the Mississippi and the Ohio. "**Ole Man River**"—the Mississippi—ran from Minnesota dead south to Louisiana, where it passed through the seaport of New Orleans. The Ohio ran roughly east to west (joining the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois). Riverboats going south along the Mississippi could run with the current, but boats trying to transport wheat to the east had to run upstream on the Ohio to the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania, where they had to stop, because the rivers did.

Railroads could cross the Alleghenies with ease, and soon stretched westward. By 1860, thousands of miles of railroads connected farms as far west as Iowa and as far north as Wisconsin with the cities of the Northeast, and the economic ties between the two regions were very strong. Because of this, the Midwestern states went with the Union.

Before the railroads were built, which is to say before 1855 or so, the main economic ties from the Midwest were tied to the Mississippi, and with the port of New Orleans. This is not the place to speculate how the war would have gone if it started in 1850, but there can be no doubt it would have been vastly different.

So how does this tie in to **Traveller**? It is amusing to toy with different means of FTL travel in a campaign. I have mentioned my own private universe, where FTL travel was much more restricted than in the **Official Traveller Universe**. What would happen if starships could make J-9 instead of J-6? What if jump routes were hard to discover and not present everywhere (as in MTU)? There would be different bottlenecks to trade routes, different "ground rules" for warfare, different economies. One or two worlds might control the trade from one part of an empire to another. A single corporation, in possession of proprietary jump tapes, might control connections with several separate economies. All from a simple change to jump physics.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The Northwest Territory contained the modern states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and a part of Minnesota. It is called the "Old Northwest" to distinguish it from the states of Washington, Oregon and (sometimes) Idaho . . . aka the "Great Northwest." Many people confuse the two—if only because the phrase "Northwest Territory" is not mentioned much these days.

Mar 14, 2005, All the News that's Fit, We Use

GMs are always looking for inspiration for adventures and campaigns. Under the general principle that truth is stranger than fiction, internet news services can provide inspiration for use in a game. You won't get a completely plotted-out scenario from the news (not usually, anyway) but more often than not you can find little tidbits to flesh out a larger story or to add side plots and distractions.

For example, consider these two news items, both from Africa, one involving lions, and the other involving a rather large crocodile.* Neither one of these provide a complete adventure on their own, but both of them (and any number of similar items) can add a touch of the extraordinary.

Take the lion photos, for example. Swap in some exotic extraterrestrial carnivore for the felines, and trade a scout or merchant ship for the aircraft, and you have the basis for an amusing bit of business. The GM will, of course, need to create some reason why the adventurers cannot solve their problem in the traditional manner—gunfire—but this should

impose no great difficulty. Perhaps the animals are sacred to the local populace? Perhaps they are pets of the local official responsible for approving your exit visa? Perhaps (for ultimate comedic effect) the crewmember left to guard the ship fell asleep in the shade, and the critters (well known to be harmless if not provoked) decided to join him?

The crocodile situation is slightly different—what if the adventurers are hired to solve a number of mysterious disappearances on a relatively remote installation on a frontier world? If the critter in question is not indigenous to the world—an escaped pet grown large or a zoological specimen, perhaps—there would be no reason to suspect its presence. What if the beast has been trained for the task at hand, and is being used for some nefarious purpose by parties unknown? Gunfire can provide a suitable denouement in this situation, but with some clever game-mastering, several amusing adventure sessions can result, especially if the GM consults the book or the movie dealing with a similar, and equally historical, situation.

As has been said so many times before, you can't make up stuff this good.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My thanks to fan and **TML** listmon2 Rob Davenport for providing this link.

Mar 28, 2005, Details . . . Details

One of the general principles of game design that I follow is to know when to not go into detail. Several aspects of the **Traveller** background have never been formally detailed, and a good many of these are things that are important to our everyday life, and presumably to those of the inhabitants of the future as well. One reason I use for leaving things unsaid is this: While the solution to a given problem may be vitally important, the specific details of the solution are not.*

For example, take the question of sanitary facilities in a vacc suit. People spend hours in the things, sometimes even days—surely the question has been dealt with efficiently and comfortably in the highly efficient world of the future? The matter has been dealt with rather haphazardly by the American space program. SF authors Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle imply that the Soviets had solved the problem in their novel **Lucifer's Hammer**, but do not reveal what the solution was. My position is this: this is such a problem that someone, somewhere in the game's future history must have come up with a solution (possibly several)—I just don't know what it is, so I don't go into specifics. I wave my hands enough over big things, I don't need to do it for the small stuff as well.

Another general example is the question of laundry on starships. People presumably sweat and get dirty in **Traveller**. No doubt their clothes are also somewhat the worse for wear after a hard day of repelling boarders and saving the universe. I am also cynic enough to assume that in the perfect world of the future, buttons still fall off. Who sews the buttons back on? Who patches the laser burns/bullet holes from all those "flesh wounds" the plot requires? Starships must have laundry facilities—small washer/dryer units have been manufactured for decades, and I suspect those of the future will be even smaller and more sophisticated. I remember reading several SF stories where mention is made, in passing, about clothing electrostatically repelling dirt, and more recently nanomachines are called into service. But, what players in their right minds want to deal with laundry? I can see it being a fun thing for the GM to bring up once in a while, but no one should have to deal with that sort of thing in a game—that's too much like real life for my taste.

Another example that comes up from time to time: I assume that chairs, couches,

beds, and other furniture in the **Official Traveller Universe** are adjustable (within reason) to 90% of the assorted alien physiques included in the background—I imagine there are openings (or at least knockouts) to allow for assorted caudal appendages, and adjustments for a reasonable variety of sizes and shapes of hip/spine/limb dimensions. I've never gone into the details of how all of these actually work—for one thing I haven't a clue what would be involved. I just take it for granted that when the adventurers hire a Vargr/Bwap/Aslan, that they don't have to buy new furniture/acceleration couches/plumbing.

This is not to say that I oppose the inclusion of interesting details form time to time. Little things can add to the perceived realism of a game, and that is vitally important. There can be too much of a good thing, however. All of this is different from not going into details of how the jump drive works.** Nothing about any of the above problems violate major laws of physics.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Several sources have assigned this a label: The IJD Principle—IJD standing for "It Just Does."

** As I remarked to an enquiring fan more than 15 years ago "If I knew how to build one, I'd have patented it."

Apr 11, 2005, Three Approaches to Adventure Design

I've made no secret of the fact that I am a very poor GM. I have a good working knowledge of what a good GM should be . . . and I don't possess very many of those qualities. Fortunately for me, you don't have to be a good GM to write good adventures. Over the years, I have used a variety of techniques and I thought I'd summarize three of them here (working from memory, and without notes).

One early approach to creating adventures was Marc Miller's "P*ush/Pull/Gimmick/et cetera*" formula. Marc felt that every adventure should have:

A **push**, which was something that motivated the adventurers to immediate action. This was the starting point of the adventure, the immediate call to action. Usually, it involved the adventurers need for funds . . .

A **pull**, which was something that kept things moving, a long term goal, prize, or reward. This can be fame, friends in high places, medals and decorations, or the thanks of a grateful government (wink-wink).

At least one **gimmick**. A gimmick was a high tech goodie, preferably something unique (or at least scarce), that the group could end up possessing as a tangible reward in addition to whatever fiscal reward there might be. All too often, this was a weapon, given **Traveller**'s early philosophy.

An **Enigma**. Marc believed that every adventure should leave the group with one unanswered question, one unsolved mystery, or at least a piece of alien and puzzling technology. The enigma was an excellent method of linking adventures together into campaigns, because trying to get the answers would lead to other adventures.

Marc's technique is very useful as a general guide, but its chief flaw is that it doesn't help the GM very much with the sequence of events. When do the players discover each element? The push and the pull have to come near the beginning, obviously, but when should the enigma and the gimmick show up?

Another approach I used in my early days was lifted from George M. Cohan's advice on writing stage plays:

"In the first act, get your man up a tree." The adventurers should be placed in a sticky situation which will require quick thinking and fast action to extricate themselves.

"In the second act, throw rocks at him." The adventurers, in the process of solving their initial problem, discover that they are actually in greater jeopardy than they first thought, and encounter setbacks.

"In the third act, get him out of the tree." The adventurers extricate themselves from their situation, and receive their promised reward, or something similar to it.

Cohan's advice was for writers of stage plays or musical comedies, and while it lays out the sequence of events fairly well, it places quite a load on the GM to make things flexible. Players don't like "railroad" adventures where they proceed through a number of set piece encounters along the road to the climax. Mr. Cohan's formula will appeal to GMs and players who are more interested in a good story than in other aspects of an adventure.

A very similar approach (and a favorite of designer Frank Chadwick) was laid out by screenwriting guru Syd Field, in his book **Screenplay**:

The Beginning. Mr. Field believes that the first ten minutes of a film (or ten pages of a screenplay—one page = one minute is the formula) are the most important. By ten minutes into the film, the audience should have at least seen the major players, have a rough idea of the setting, and know what the initial problem facing the characters is. Adapting this to RPG adventure writing, the beginning of any adventure should acquaint the players with the general situation, let them know the major problems they will face along the way, and get them started. It may also include a small, easily overcome obstacle to keep the players interested.

The First Plot Point. Mr. Field says this should occur about 25-30 minutes into the movie, and represents where the real obstacle is discovered. In writing an adventure, the first plot point should occur somewhere near the start, and should be worked into the action by the GM in accordance with whatever actions the adventurers take during the initial phase of the adventure. This requires some creative thought on the part of the GM, but is fairly easy because the characters should not have strayed far from the starting point yet.

The Second Plot Point. Mr. Field suggests that the second plot point should occur about half to two-thirds of the way into the film. This is where "plan A" comes apart, and things go along a vastly different course than was expected. In RPG adventures, this is where the true nature of the opposition and the final obstacle is revealed to the adventurers, and they must devise a solution to their problem(s), often on the fly.

The End. Here the final problem is dealt with and the final confrontation occurs, in both film and adventure.*

This has the advantage of being less restrictive on the flow of the game, since all the GM has to force on the players is the two plot points and the conclusion.

I incline more toward Syd Field's approach, but also use bits of the others. Analytical fans may wish to examine my adventures for clues as to which technique(s) I used in any given product—just don't ask me to confirm your conclusions . . . I don't remember myself.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* In **Traveller**, this traditionally involved gunfire, but more recently this has become less common.

Apr 25, 2005, Props

Another early notion Marc had for **Traveller** was the idea that players and referees

would want props for their games. Marc had created some forms to make various record keeping aspects of the game easier, and we began printing these on the mailing cover of the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** (the mailing cover was a sheet of stiff cardstock bound on the outside of the magazine to protect it in mailing, and to provide a surface where we could paste the mailing label without covering up some portion of the cover artwork). After we got the **Compugraphic MCS** typesetting system, it became very easy to incorporate rules (using the term as it is used in typesetting—most people call them "lines") and simple geometric forms such as boxes into the form without the need for someone in the art department to go through the considerable rigmarole of adding them.* You simply had to figure out how to instruct the typesetting software to draw a line of a specified thickness from point A to point B, and repeat this as often as needed.

Marc reveled in the task of creating forms and charts, and soon branched out into other things—such as ID cards for various in-game organizations or stationary for various Megacorporations—which had no in-game function, but helped players visualize what was going on by adding to the games perceived realism. If you were a retired Scout, you had an ID card (with a space for a photo you had to supply yourself . . . I often wonder how many people actually got passport photos for the ID cards), if you were a member of the **Travellers' Aid Society,** you had a membership card. Marc even created credentials for TNS reporters.

I recall being skeptical when Marc wanted to publish a product of such things (**Forms and Charts**), but I soon became a supporter.

Now, of course, desktop publishing enables people to create such things with an ease our production department would have envied way back when. Laser printers can whip out an original in seconds, and at a high enough quality to incorporate photos and complex artwork (which can also be created electronically). It still requires some creative input, but the time involved in actually creating the physical product is vastly reduced—which is why so many people do things like this for their games.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Back in the day, if you wanted a line on something, you typeset it so that you left space for it, and then someone had to go through the following ritual:

First, you took the page to a drafting table and taped it down so it wouldn't move while you were working on it (you used drafting tape for this, because you didn't want the paper to tear when you removed it), making sure that the lines of text were lined up at right angles to the edges of the drafting table by using the handy T-square each table was provided with.

Second, you took a non-reproducible blue pencil and marked out where you wanted the rules (sorry . . . lines) to go, using the aforementioned T-square and a set of drafting triangles to make sure the lines were square.

Third, using drafting pens, you carefully inked along the guidelines, making sure the ink didn't smear or get sucked under the various straightedges and such you used to guide the pen to draw a straight line. An alternative to this was to use one of several brands of very, very narrow black tape . . . which was a lot less messy, but had problems of its own. If you wanted rectangles or other geometric shape, you either pasted them in place from a set of pre-printed shapes (available at the local art supply store or printing supply shop) or laboriously drew them with pen and ink. Logos or photos had to be stuck in place with rubber cement or mounting wax.

I learned to do some of this myself, because our art department was usually so overloaded, it was the only way to get something done quickly.

May 09, 2005, Games Past

A week or two ago, I was exchanging messages with a fan of **GDW's Twilight: 2000** (one of the other games I have worked with over the years) and I was asked when was the last time I played. My correspondent was a bit taken aback when I admitted that I had never actually played **Twilight: 2000**. I have audited* or GMed a number of sessions during the playtest of the game, but I have never actually played it. The fan's reaction was to note that this was like discovering that one of the Beach Boys had never actually been surfing. I quickly reassured him that I had played many RPGs, just not all of them.

I have both played and refereed **D&D** of course, although I have not done so since before **AD&D** came out. I have played and/or GMed games of **D&D**, *En Garde*, **Boot Hill, Traveller** (both during the playtest and after), **Call of Cthulhu, Privateers and Gentlemen,** (where I played one of the few Danish pirates on the Spanish Main), **Paranoia, 2300 AD,** and **Dark Conspiracy.** I played in a couple of sessions of a **GURPS** campaign when I was with **GDW** (not sure of the year, but I think it was shortly before the third edition came out), but that broke up when the GM was transferred. This does not count board wargames, computer games, or tabletop miniatures games (my main enthusiasm—I'm a lead-pusher above all else). For those keeping track, the last game I played that was not part of the **SJG** weekly playtest sessions was Puerto Rico (unless you count my solo activities with **Command Decision 4** and **Ancient Conquest**—both of these are playtests of unpublished designs by my friend and former boss Frank Chadwick).

Obviously, I don't think that a person has to play a game to be able to design for it. I do think that there are general principles of gaming and game design. I have discussed a few of these in past editorials, and I will do more in upcoming issues.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I use the word "audited" to mean not that I went over the finances of the playtest, but in a variation of the way it is used by college students—to attend a class not for credit, but merely to listen and absorb knowledge. The word has the same root as "audio" and "auditorium" and originates from the fact that accountants used to examine account books by having them read aloud. All reading was once done aloud. In the not too distant past—frontier schoolhouses in 19th Century America were sometimes called "blab schools" because students did all their reading out loud. Perhaps this will enable you to win your next game of Trivial Pursuit?

May 23, 2005, Reading and Writing

I have no facility with languages. I had two years of Latin in high school and two semesters of German in college,* but after thirty years I retain little of either. Fortunately, my career went in other directions than I originally intended, and it leaves me free to pursue a variety of impulsive studies.

One of these recently lead me to a book by Andrew Robinson, **Lost Languages**. This is a general study of the more interesting of the various undeciphered scripts of past history, including (among others) the **Indus Valley** script, the **Phaistos** disc, and *Rongorongo* (a word meaning "chants" or "recitations"), the mysterious "writing" of the inhabitants of Easter Island (I put writing in quotes because some authorities are not sure it is a writing system at all, but believe it to be a system of mnemonic aids). The book is interesting (to me at least) on several levels:

First, the mystery represented by a language that cannot be read intrigues me. How

much could we learn about the Indus Valley society if we could read their script? Right now, pretty much all that is know of this early civilization is from the remains excavated by archeologists, and what little is written about them by others. The same thing holds for the culture of Easter Island . . . very little is known with any degree of certainty.

Second, the means by which unreadable scripts are deciphered is also fascinating. Sometimes it is possible to partially decipher scripts even if the language is unknown. It is often possible to separate out the symbols used for numbers from the rest of the language. In many cases, proper names are among the first things to be translated (most known words in Etruscan are proper names, for example). This sort of work is made easier if a large sample of the script is available, but sometimes this is not possible (in the case of the **Phaistos** disc, for example, there is only the one small sample—less than a hundred words).

The most successful decipherments are either where the language is known (or is at least similar to a known language) or where a bi-lingual document is found (such as the Rosetta stone in the case of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Sometimes, a given script can only be partially deciphered despite the best of efforts. The application of computer technology to the problem has made certain aspects of decipherment go faster, but has not yet been instrumental in "cracking the code" of any ancient script. The main use has been to run various statistical analyses of scripts, determining which symbols are commonly found in association with each other, which appear at the end of words, and so on.

The translation of alien languages is a staple of science fiction, and first contact scenarios are a popular subject. **Traveller** deals with languages only slightly, and only one product (**Annic Nova**) dealt even tangentially with the decipherment of an alien script. It is difficult enough to create a believable alien language (let alone a script for it), and harder still to work it into an adventure in a way that the players can solve the puzzle in any reasonable length of time—and few players would be very entertained by this sort of thing anyway.

A quick on-line search will reveal many fonts for alien languages from SF literature, movies, and television (here is a hint to get you started). Most of these were created by fans, taking them from popular SF shows on television, and made into fonts using the myriad software programs designed for such things. Those of you who create props for your games will find these things useful. I haven't done a search for it, but somebody has to have created a font using the symbols of *Rongorongo*—they look alien enough to the western eye to pass for something from another world.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My intention was to study Roman history, and the reason for Latin should be obvious. The serious student of Roman history should also have a working knowledge of classical Greek (I decided not to try—I had trouble enough with languages without adding the additional problems of a different alphabet). Why German? In the 19th Century, the major scholars of Rome were German, and a working knowledge of German is necessary to use reference works such as the ***Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft.***

Jun 06, 2005, Psi Powers in Traveller

On the rare occasions when I GMed **Traveller** games, **p**sionics didn't come up much (I've discussed my feelings about psi in the real world earlier). For some reason, the group I was gaming with didn't feel the need—some of the players in my games never checked to see if their characters had significant powers.

GDW included psionics in **Traveller** because Marc and the rest of us felt that even an

SF RPG needed a form of "magic" if it was to appeal to the widest possible segment of the market. Many SF stories involved psi powers and the individuals who possessed them, and many authors seemed to specialize in such themes. I was rather surprised, not too long ago, to discover that Mark Twain was among them.

Mark Twain (the pen name of Samuel Clemens) is most famous for novels like T**om Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn**, but also wrote extensively on a number of topics, as I discovered recently while thumbing through a collection of his essays. Twain had an interest in a wide variety of subjects, including the research into the paranormal that absorbed the attention of many of the leading authors of the time (including British author Arthur Conan Doyle, of **Sherlock Holmes** fame). Twain followed the reports of the investigations into mediums and psychics (which he considered to be mostly charlatans), and into prophetic dreams and visions (which he remained undecided about). He puzzled over things that happened to himself and his friends and family: one incident involved a friend, who decided, on the spur of the moment, to send a letter to an acquaintance that he hadn't written in years, only to receive a similar letter from that person the day after mailing it. In the essay I happened across recently, Twain concludes with an anecdote that arose from a simple question a fan asked him: "Have you ever had a vision, while awake?" Shortly after being asked the question, Twain had an episode which he admits he would have considered mystical (a visitor vanishing before his eyes in broad daylight), had he not been considering the fan's question at the time. He concludes that he was asleep, and did not realize it: "Now, how are you to tell when you are awake? What are you to go by? People bite their fingers to find out. Why, you can do that in a dream."

In other essays and articles, Twain speculates on the reality of what he calls "mental telegraphy"—which we now label "telepathy"—deciding that while there may be something to it in some cases, the concept is a long way from proven. Everyone has "hunches," he observes, and wonders if they are the result of some subconscious mental process rather than a mysterious mental power or divine talent.

Marc and Frank applied considerable thought to the ramifications that widespread psi talent would have on society, and decided that a better game would result if psi was scarce and seldom practiced, but that adventurers could have slightly wider access to it. For this reason, in the **OTU (Official Traveller Universe)**, psi powers are distrusted by the populace as a whole, and practiced on an underground basis by several groups, the Imperial government included. The Zhodani were created mostly as a result of in-house **GDW** discussions on what form a psi-embracing society would take. We concluded most of our players wouldn't like it, and we seem to have been correct.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 20, 2005, Some Things Don't Change . . . Much

I spend hours each day following the various **Traveller** mailing lists, discussion boards, chats, and blogs, in addition to those for a few other topics I'm interested in. Some of that is undoubtedly because of my slow internet connection,* but some of it is because the internet has given more people the freedom to wax eloquent (or rattle on endlessly, some would say) on their favorite subjects. The wordcount generated was described as "a fire hose into my eyes" by author Cliff Stoll (author of **The Cuckoo's Egg**)—more than twenty years ago, and the simile remains as apt as ever because technology has made it easier for people to crank out words—although it hasn't helped much in the quality of the words cranked out.

While the technology of communication has changed over the years, the subject mat-

ter hasn't changed that much. There are a few new topics that are well on their way to becoming old standbys, but many of the old topics are still doing a land-office business. Some of this is because new people show up regularly, and ask the same questions over and over. Anyone who has ever participated in a mailing list or chat has run into the "clueless newbie" who asks something that has been discussed to death. Some of it, however, is because some people like to discuss certain topics, and gain endless pleasure from the debate.

Before the internet, these discussions took place by mail, or in "fanzines"—cheaply printed collections of letters mailed to a small circle of people with shared interests, known as "amateur press associations," or APAs. The APA editor would collect letters from the circle, arrange bits of them according to topics, type the collection onto mimeograph stencils (the invention of the photocopier made the process easier and cheaper, and caused an explosion in the number of APAs), and print up copies which were mailed to the circle.** Recipients would respond with more letters, and another "issue" would be printed and mailed.

RPGs generated a number of APAs (as well as more conventional fan-produced magazines), and the discussions in those early days tended to be on many of the same topics as the present day **TML**: discussions over how jump drives work, exactly, and whether pirates are possible/desirable/inevitable. Even the creation of lists of "frequently asked questions" (FAQs) and "dead horse" lists of arguments that cannot be settled to the satisfaction of all parties does not prevent the same discussions from popping up over and over again.

I used to get annoyed at this sort of thing until I realized what this meant: new people were joining in and participating, and were enthusiastic enough to carry on in the face of "we've done this before" arguments. New people means new customers for game companies, new players for GMs, and new opponents for gamers. It's hard to make that sound like a bad thing.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'm still using dial-up for various reasons I won't go into here.
** Purists will forgive me if I simplify a few things. APAs still exist (desktop publishing has made them easier than ever) and were always more complex than I have described.

Jul 04, 2005, Technology and Innovation

One of the most common criticisms of **Traveller** was that the rate of technological innovation in the game doesn't advance as fast as it does in the (so-called) real world, especially with regard to computers. The topic has been discussed pretty much to death in the last couple of decades—basically, **Traveller** drew inspiration from science fiction stories of the 1960s and 1970s,* and the wildest speculations of SF authors were off base as a predictor of computing power.**

I recently ran across mention of an analysis by physicist Jonathan Huebner which concludes that the rate of technological innovation is not increasing exponentially, but has actually been declining since the late 19th century. Huebner concludes we are headed for a period of stagnation—a dark age, if you will. This is certain to become a hotly discussed topic in many circles, and I won't take it any further here.

What I would like to do is propose a contest (no prizes, I'm afraid, except the recognition of a job well done): What is the oldest technology still in common use? I won't even define what I mean by "technology" so as to give maximum range to tthee discussion :)

The first thing that occurs to me is that fire is a leading candidate. Use of fire predates Homo sapiens, going back to H. erectus at least. Starting a fire intentionally came somewhat

later, but it must have been discovered relatively soon after flint working technologies were discovered (in the Paleolithic), so it goes back hundreds of millennia. Making fire by friction is the basic principle of matches everywhere, but it can be argued that the chemistry involved in a match is only vaguely similar to the use of a fire-board or similar device. A cigarette lighter, however, still ignites fire by a variation on the "flint and steel" technique (albeit the basic materials are a little more sophisticated).

The use of fire itself continues, in industry and elsewhere. I'm writing this essay on July 4th, and I have merely to stick my head outside for ample olfactory evidence of people cooking using fire. Is fire our oldest technology? What are the close runner ups? I leave the elaboration of these questions to the readers.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Since it was published in 1977, it could hardly draw inspiration from the stories of the 1980s and 1990s.

** Isaac Asimov used to write stories about gigantic analog computers (ACs) that took up entire buildings/counties/continents/planets. His short story "**The Final Question**" deals with a computer so large it has to reside completely in hyperspace. It has puzzled me for some time why the good doctor would write about gargantuan computers in the same story that included intelligent robots (who, presumably, did not have brains the size of planets). His career covered such a large span of years, however, that he eventually ended up writing many of his stories on a computer, which was vastly less-powerful than a voice-recognition writing device he mentions casually in his Foundation trilogy—maybe the good doctor had a clue after all?

Jul 18, 2005, Oldest Tech: Part II

I received a fair number of responses to my question in last issue's editorial. My suggestion of fire as the earliest technology that is still in active use had many supporters, but others suggested additional entries for my little "contest."

A common suggestion was that the "blunt object" was still very much around. One correspondent suggested that simply picking up a stick and whacking something with it was not really tool-making or a real technology, but that cutting one to a convenient length, and stripping surplus leaves and branches was. Like fire-making, there's no way to tell exactly when this first took place, but it definitely pre-dates Homo sapiens by millennia.

I was surprised that so few people brought up chipping flint into useful objects, but I'm not convinced it's currently a wide-spread technology (although I do know a couple of practitioners). The skill is still around but aside from a few people who make reproduction tools for sale, some hobbyists (like my friends), and archeologists studying the mechanics involved, it is not practiced by very many people.

Spinning and weaving were suggested by a great many. Twisting or braiding grass or plant fibers into a cord/rope is a good candidate for the oldest technology still in common use. Weaving and knitting are almost equally old, and it is a tossup which came first (twisting/braiding are simpler, and were probably discovered first . . . but no one knows for sure). The date for the oldest textiles is constantly being pushed back, and the date for the earliest evidence of basket-making and the other technologies is problematic, because the results do not tend to be preserved.* It is kind of interesting to think that a basket or a string bag might be one of the oldest links to our prehistoric past.

The most thought provoking answer, however, came from several correspondents al-

most simultaneously: language. I don't normally think of language as a technology, but in a way it is—language is a tool, and tools are technology, even if the tool isn't physically very substantial. When language arose is difficult to say . . . the answer depends on which of the numerous experts you believe, and even whether you think spoken language developed before or after some form of sign language. I think there is a good chance that language predates fire, and thus is our oldest technology. I hope everyone enjoyed my little contest—I know I found it amusing and diverting.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I don't keep up on this sort of thing, but last I heard, the earliest evidence of cloth-making was an impression on a pile of clay where someone sat on it while wearing woven cloth.

Aug 01, 2005, Planet Number 10 . . . and Counting

Every couple of years for the last decade, somebody looking through a telescope* announces they've discovered "The 10th planet." One of the more recent candidates,** which bears the temporary moniker 2003 UB313 has sparked a debate (once again) over the proposition: What, exactly, is a planet, anyway. It seems that 2003 UB313 is far enough out (97 AU) to qualify as a Kuiper Belt Object (or "KBO" to those in the know) and is (probably) larger than Pluto. That last tidbit is the important part: up until now, the "10th planet" candidates have been smaller than Pluto.

For decades (pretty much since its discovery in the 1930s) the status of Pluto has been debated. It is not very big, as planets go (I don't recall the details, but a web search will reveal them for the curious), and its planetary status has always been suspect. Pluto's orbit radically diverges from the orbital plane of the other planets, and is so eccentric that not too long ago, Pluto was inside the orbit of Neptune (the undisputed 8th planet). When I was in elementary school, my science text said words to the effect that "A few scientists believe that Pluto is an escaped moon of Neptune." This is one of those "Where do we draw the line?" arguments that some people enjoy more than anything else. What is a planet?

Most people consider that a planet orbits a star, and a moon orbits a planet. By this definition, there are thousands (if not millions) of planets orbiting Sol, so most people add another criteria, namely a minimum diameter. Some people feel the minimum should be the point at which gravity shapes a chunk of stuff into a (roughly) spherical form, others have some (pretty much arbitrary) number. A few add other criteria, like requiring that the body be in roughly the same orbital plane as everything else, and so on. Some point to tradition, but this is unsatisfying to scientists. Some people arguing for 2003 UB313 are also against Pluto's planethood because they want to keep the figure of nine planets (I think this is the weakest argument of all).

Is Pluto a planet? I think so, which makes it hard to argue that 2003 UB313 isn't one. What do you think? Go to this issue's poll and register your vote.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Before people write to correct me, I know that very few professional astronomers actually look through telescopes anymore—I'm using the phrase as a metaphor for astronomical research in general.

** They are coming so fast I have lost count . . . there are three in the last two weeks, I think.

Aug 14, 2005, Technology and Society

Recently, I have been thinking about societies and technology, and a few things occurred to me that others might not realize. Fore example, medical care:

When I was a child, there were no widespread immunizations for measles, chicken pox, diptheria tetanus, and similar diseases. In common with most children of my generation, I contracted measles, then mumps, then chicken pox. Throughout the course of each of these diseases, I had to be isolated in a special bedroom in my parents house (there were four bedrooms and eight inhabitants of my parents house, so this required some inconvenience on everyone else), in an attempt to keep that particular disease from spreading to the rest of us (a vain attempt, as it turned out). The local doctor came to me, in what was known as a house call and oversaw the progress of my disease. The other children my age ended up going through something similar, and seeing seats temporarily empty in the first few grades of elementary school was not at all uncommon. Isolation was the main means that kept the "childhood diseases" in check, and it was applied to practically everything from the common cold on up. Occasionally, one of my comrades would contract something highly contagious and riskier to the population as a whole, such as rheumatic fever, and the whole household would be isolated. I remember seeing one of the neighboring houses with a pasteboard sign on the front door:

QUARANTINE
By Order of
the Board of Health

and my parents ordering me not to go on that block until further notice. No one was allowed in or out except the doctor, my mother explained, until the patient was no longer contagious, so nobody else in town would get sick. None of my classmates died of any of these "childhood diseases"—we were exceedingly fortunate, because measles and mumps and chicken pox killed a number of children every year.

In those days, nobody went to the hospital unless they were extremely ill, needed surgery, or to give birth. To my grandparents, hospitals were where you went to die. My parents had a slightly improved opinion of them. There are people who cannot conceive of staying home with a major disease, and the notion of the doctor coming to visit you seems odd.

Prior to 1950 or so, doctors could carry most of the modern medical arsenal around with them in a small bag. With the development of sophisticated diagnostic machinery, however, the hospital or clinic was a better location for treatment. Widespread immunizations and an explosion of antibiotics and other drugs mean that the "childhood diseases" of earlier years are rarely encountered.

The development of personal communications is currently changing society—ten years ago, the sight of a person walking down the street holding a conversation with an invisible person would have been prima facie evidence of mental disorder. Hands-free cell phones have changed all that. At least one science fiction author has predicted that his children, accustomed to either being with their friends or electronically chatting with them, will find it odd that the rest of us had to deal with being totally alone for hours on end.

I ran across a magazine article a few days ago that discussed the history of auto racing in the United States. There were 89 entries in the first formal automobile race in 1895. At the time, there were not 89 functional race cars in the country—several were still under construction, since automobiles were one-off creations at that time. Early race cars carried a driver and a mechanic, and it was not uncommon for drivers to carry brooms to drag behind then (to create clouds of dust to blind competitors) or to throw wrenches* at each other.

I wonder what else the citizens of the future will find quaint about our culture. "Did you know that in granddad's day, tats didn't move? What's up with that?"

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One driver is on record as preferring to throw a fistful of bolts—equally effective and nowhere near as vital.

Aug 29, 2005, Anxiety

One of the things that interests me is the subject of anxiety dreams. These dreams are a manifestation of the daily pressures and worries into one's dreams, and are quite common. They take different forms, sometimes comical, sometimes nightmarish—common examples include:

Discovering yourself in a public place, either naked or clad in your underwear.

Finding yourself in school, confronted by a test for which you are completely unprepared.

Suddenly remembering a class you signed up for, but never attended. This dream and the previous one can continue for decades after graduation from high school/college.

Finding yourself trapped in a burning building, or one that is collapsing.

I am particularly prone to a dream where I have just finished the manuscript for a writing project on my computer, then discover that I cannot save it. As I flounder about helplessly looking for the elusive "ctrl" key (which I can clearly see, but which moves when I try to press it as part of the "ctrl-s" combination), the keyboard begins to melt, followed by the rest of the computer, then I awaken. My reading on the subject and discussions with others indicate the dreams have a few common threads, but can be highly individualized.

The thing that interests me most about them is the question of what form they took in the past. School/test-related dreams have their basis in the common experience of public education, and clearly are of relatively recent origin. What were anxiety dreams like before high school became a common experience. Did knights dream of discovering themselves without armor in the midst of a tourney? Did cavemen dream of facing down a mammoth, only to find their spear was a harmless twig? Do nudists have the "underwear" dream? A history professor friend of mine provided an anecdote from a Roman public official, who writes of dreaming that he is called before the emperor and required to produce "the report."

All of which brings me to the next question: What form will these dreams take in the future (and in the **Traveller** universe)? Will pilots dream of initiating jump, only to find the controls have vanished? Will starship crew dream of finding themselves outside the ship without a vacc suit? Do emperors dream of reception lines where they are gunned down?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Sep 12, 2005, Disconnecting

In 1988, author and futurist John Naisbitt wrote **MegaTrends**, a book detailing what he felt were ten major factors about the future. All in all, the book has held up pretty well. Recently, however, it occurred to me that one of his minor predictions has not come to pass.

Naisbitt noted an increasing tendency for decentralization in the workplace, and how computers and improved communication technology allowed a large number of people to work at home. He predicted, however, that this would eventually decline because white collar workers would miss the social aspects of the office. People are social animals, he reasoned, and will seek out the company of others. He also thought that people would want to keep home and work separate.

Naisbitt's initial prediction has come true, and **SJ Games** is an example. While there is a central office, **SJ Games** employs an increasing number of people who seldom show up there (your humble editor included). Even Steve Jackson himself (now that Stephen Sopko has taken over as COO) is working increasing hours out of the office. Wireless internet technology now enables people to unplug themselves from modems,* and work wherever there is a WiFi center. In the hi-tech city of Austin, Texas, these can be found in what seems to be an ever-expanding profusion, and not just in **Starbuck's** coffee shops. Decentralization continues with a vengeance, also. A television commercial from a telecommunications company is now emphasizing how executives can work from anywhere (using their products and services, of course), and the office can be wherever you happen to be. The outflow of telecommuting jobs to India and other countries (where wages are lower) is a major concern to some American hi-tech workers.

Naisbitt's second prediction about out of office workers, however, seems to be slower in coming. Telecommuters retain social contacts, but these contacts are through cell phones, PDAs, and laptops. One SF author noted recently that his children are never alone, since if they are not actually with their friends, they are telephoning, e-mailing, or text-messaging them. People remain social animals, but it seems that they don't always need to be in the same place to socialize. A second factor that has been noticed by some writers is that people continue to have friends and social contacts, but they are different from their work contacts.

Naisbitt continues to write, and it will be interesting to see how things develop in the next few years.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Sadly, your humble editor is not yet one of these fortunates. I don't have a laptop, let alone a wireless one. I don't even have a cellular phone, and I'll be posting this editorial to the web using a dial-up connection. How 90s of me!

Sep 26, 2005, Be Prepared

In view of the two recent tests of America's ability to respond to natural disasters, I thought I'd depart from a completely **Traveller**-related editorial this time. The motto of the Boy Scouts of America is "Be Prepared," and I grew up in a family that took that to heart. My father believed that every family should be prepared to live without electrical power or a municipal water supply for a minimum of three days. My family lived in a rural village in central Illinois, and in the 1950s and 1960s, it was not unusual to lose electrical power at least once every year or two. As this usually happened in the middle of winter (snow or sleet brought down power lines), the cold often presented an additional complication.

I learned early to think about what could happen, and form a plan of action: How

would I get out of my (second floor) bedroom if a fire blocked the door or the stairs? How could I escape if a car I was riding in became submerged? Later on, my reading turned up more advice.

When I moved to Texas, I brought the "Tornado Kit" I had assembled in Illinois with me, and it now does duty as my "Hurricane/Tornado" kit. It was put together on the basis of my perceived need for materials to allow me to "get by" if a storm took out my electricity and water supply. I have a "fire escape" plan worked out in my mind for the new apartment, and I have a general procedure when I get on an airplane to locate the emergency exits and imagine how I'd get to them without being able to see them. This is pretty much the extent of my disaster plans. Experts in survival say the most important things are:

Formulate a plan. Rehearse the plan.

Re-evaluate the plan periodically.

The first step in formulating a plan is to pick a disaster: a house fire, a plane crash, an automobile accident, bad weather, alien invasion,* etc. You will need to be guided by your local situation—some regions are more prone to tornadoes than others, for example, others to earthquakes, blizzards, and so on. In most cases, there is a lot of overlap in planning for various disasters, so the materials acquired for my tornado plan are also useful in my hurricane plan, for example. To help you out, there are numerous books on this subject (here's one), and a search on-line for "survival" will turn up the usual spread of worthwhile and worthless sites. Your plan will need to take into account your family, including your pets (unless you plan to let them fend for themselves), and should co-ordinate with your friends and relatives as necessary (especially if you plan on bugging out and dropping on their doorstep). Determine what you'll need, and acquire it. An often forgotten part of disaster planning is the formulation of one or more backup plans (what if you're stuck at work when the tornado strikes?). The most important things about a plan is that it be realistic and easy to remember—because a plan is no good if no one knows what they are supposed to do. Which brings us to rehearsals.

Rehearsing a plan is also important, and is the step most often left out. I have known families who actually lived without power and water for 24 hours to experience what it was like—they called it "camping in the back yard," but their real purpose was clear. Of course, it isn't necessary to go to such extremes—you can conduct the family equivalent of a military "map exercise"—but in some cases you can hold "fire drills" and the like without disrupting the household too much. As often as not, a mental "dry run" is perfectly adequate. The airlines encourage passengers, when they board a plane, to observe where the two closest exits are and imagine how to get to them. I like to look over the escape doors (I try to get seated in an escape row when I can . . . there's usually more legroom) and mentally** go over how they open. Those of you with children might consider creating a simple RPG for your kids, to help them prepare for a fire, a flood, or an earthquake.

The final step is to periodically evaluate your plan(s) to account for changes in your life. When you move to a new dwelling, when a child is born, when you get too old to climb down the trellis, and so on. Also, make sure the flashlight batteries are fully charged, that the food you've set aside hasn't turned into a science experiment, and that the cousin you plan on rooming with after you evacuate still owns a house big enough to hold all of you.

To relate all of this to **Traveller**: the advice about planning and preparation applies to your characters as well as to yourself.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This is obviously harder to plan for than some other situations, and could probably be omitted.

** I think it would be a nice idea if airlines provided "dummy" escape doors for me to practice on while I'm waiting for the flight to board, but for some reason they don't.

Oct 10, 2005, Adventure Isn't What it Used to Be

About twenty years ago, I read an article in **National Geographic Magazine** that I felt signaled the end of an era. The article was written by a woman who wanted to travel alone across the breadth of the Australian Outback by camel, without benefit of motorized transport, traveling cross country as the first explorers did. It was a typical **National Geographic**-style travel article, filled with photographs (many of them taken with a tripod and a timer, since the woman was alone in her journey) and information about the Australian Outback, but one part leapt out at me. In the midst of the trek, her baggage camel went lame. She radioed for assistance, and a plane flew out, bringing a veterinarian and additional supplies. After the camel recovered, she continued her trek. It occurred to me that the era of epic wilderness adventures had pretty much ended. A few decades before, and the tale would have no doubt ended with the woman's death, or at least in a harrowing escape from the midst of the bush country, barely making it to the nearest isolated farm.

I'm probably one of the last members of Western Civilization not to have a cell phone.* The lack has not proven too much of a hardship (aside from a couple of times when traveling or when trying to coordinate a number of relatives in town), but I have finally decided to get one as soon as my situation permits. Most **Traveller** players and GMs expect high tech communicators to be part of the standard equipment of any adventuring group . . . if they aren't surgically implanted in their mastoids. All this is well and good, but some of the earliest **Traveller** adventures depended on the adventurers being (temporarily at least) cut off. The sort of adventures that the **GDW** staff and the original **Traveller** playtesters enjoyed most involved actions in remote areas, far from civilization, much like the **National Geographic** adventures of earlier days. The younger players find it intolerable that, when faced with a situation like the one encountered in **Across the Bright Face**, they simply cannot radio their ship and have an air/raft sent to bring them cold drinks and carry them to safety. Some people are so used to being able to talk to someone on the other side of the planet in real life that they cannot conceive of a situation in the far future where this might be difficult or impossible.

A cell phone is nothing more than a short range radio, and (without going into too much detail) they rely on a system of relay towers to enable them to work their magic. Some depend on satellites, but the general principal is the same: without the support network, a single cell phone or portable radio has a pretty limited range. Radios that can send signals around the world exist, but they require pretty good sized antenna arrays and power supplies. Someone on the **TML** recently pointed out that present day ham radios, although they are vastly more sophisticated now, are not much smaller than they were two or three decades ago.

On worlds where there is no network of towers or orbiting satellite(s), or where the network can't be used for some reason (perhaps the bad guys could use it to locate you), adventurers will need to fall back on more primitive methods. I'll freely admit that this sort of thing may not appeal to everyone all the time. Nevertheless, a good GM throws changeup pitches once in a while.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The last time I traveled by intercity bus, I noticed that all of my fellow passengers

seemed to have them . . . even those whose choice of luggage was a trash bag. I lack some of the other paraphernalia of modern life as well: PDA, iPod, laptop, 512Mb USB flash memory in a Swiss army knife**—the basics of modern life, according to some. Although as Chris Thrash remarked to me at **Dragon*Con**, "Sometimes the nineteenth century works perfectly well."

** Which is more memory than has been in every computer I've ever owned (save for my present machine) combined.

Oct 24, 2005, Unified Appliance Theory

Between my gigs at **GDW** and **SJ Games**, I worked selling computers and business electronics at a major office supply chain store. I noticed that the separate machines were beginning to merge together. First, fax machines absorbed the telephones. Very soon thereafter, the phone/fax machines themselves were absorbed by the copiers, which began calling themselves "three-in-one" (sometimes "four-in one" if they also had an answering machine inside). The next step was for the phone/fax/copier to absorb a printer.* While all of this was happening, in another part of the store, the cellular phones and the PDAs began experiments at cross-breeding.

Not that this was anything really new, of course—many common household appliances had been merging for decades: clock/radios, microwave oven/clock/radio/timers, and so on. My parents had a combined radio/phonograph from the1930s that was about the size of an easy chair. Remote controllers formed an independent taxon for many years, gradually merging together so that now a single, enormous remote can be used to control the TV, CD player, DVD, VHS, sound system, and even the mood lighting and thermostat. Cell phones started absorbing answering machines, except that their manufacturers called it voicemail for some reason.

Televisions have become smaller and smaller, and crossbred with VHS and DVD players. Computers have managed to insert their DNA into just about everything, and cell phones have absorbed cameras and teletype machines (anybody remember those?). At about this same time, the keys on the touch pad have become so small that even people with average-sized fingers have trouble using them.

My main concern with all of this remains the same caveat I used to give to the customers when I was selling them business electronics: The more things you have in one case, the more things you lose when one of them breaks. If you printer breaks down, you also lose your fax, your copier, your telephone, your daybook, and your water-cooler. The true techno-geek, however, solves this problem by having dozens of machines that can all do the same job. If the fax goes on the fritz, you can always send messages through the refrigerator, and so on.

I don't really know how much farther this trend will continue in the future. Perhaps by the year 1120 Imperial, all appliances will have fused together, and they will be injectable? This will cause some problems for people wanting a dishwasher, but that, I think, is an engineering problem.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Actually, since the fax/copier part of the machine could already print (how else could it do it's job), it was simply a matter of adding the proper connectors to enable the machine to communicate with a computer—frankly, I'm amazed it took them so long to figure it out.

Nov 07, 2005, Learning By Doing

Every so often, I get requests from fans who want to know how to "break in" to the gaming business. Some are college students who want to know if there is a preferred curriculum for game authors.* Some are just people who are looking for an enjoyable job in a field that interests them. I always give pretty much the same advice to the e-mails (more common these days), snail mail letters (less common these days), and face-to-face questions at conventions. I thought I'd summarize that answer here.

The first thing I advise is that people be prepared to earn a living through something else (I usually express it as Don't quit your day job). For all practical purposes, the only way to make a living at game design is to be a full-time employee of a game publisher—the number of freelance game authors who do not have some other source of income can be counted on the fingers of one hand. On the plus side of the ledger, however, is the fact that nearly every game publisher employs freelance writers, and it is usually from among this cadre that they choose their full-time employees.

As for education, there are no firm requirements. A college degree of some kind is common, but there are freelancers out there with little more than a high school education. A firm grounding in grammar and composition is a very good start, supplemented by one of the social sciences (history was my preference). Most importantly, in my opinion, a prospective game author must be widely read—both in literature and in games. Every professional in the industry I have ever met (and I've run into 90% of them) is a voracious reader.

Likewise, there are no training courses in becoming a game author. You learn to be one by writing, writing more, and continuing to write (this is the "learning by doing" part of the exercise).

Getting hired by an existing publisher is a matter of persistence (rather like selling a screenplay to a Hollywood studio). The best way is to accumulate a body of published work, so your talent can be displayed to a prospective employer. In previous years, this was done by writing articles for print magazines such as **Dragon, Different Worlds,** or **The Space Gamer**. Except for **Dragon Magazine**, there are very few print magazines left, and the prospective freelancer must look on-line, to electronic magazines such as **JTAS** and **Pyramid**. A good track record of well-written, highly-rated articles in these (and other) magazines is the best way to gain credentials in the business and will help you to get freelance assignments.

Having a stack of articles published will not get you writing assignments, however. You have to seek those out, and apply for them as you would apply for any other job. Determine what a particular publisher is looking for, and submit a proposal for a project that meets their requirements. **SJ Games** has several web pages devoted to recruiting potential authors, and other publishers have similar arrangements. Read these closely, and follow the instructions to the letter. In a way, the instructions for submission are a sort of test of your ability to work with the publisher. Not following them is a sure way to accumulate rejection letters. Eventually, you will learn which of the rules are iron-clad and which can be waived, but starting out, it is best to stick to follow them religiously.

Starting your own company is a great deal of work, but electronic self-publication has made it easier to get a foot in the door without the expense of printing and selling gaming product. Even for a one-person on-line operation, however, the work of preparing a work for publication remains pretty much the same as preparing it for print. A quality work requires a talented author, but that is just the start. If a work is to sell well, it must be well-written, well-edited, well-presented, and distributed widely enough to get the maximum market. Few individuals can do everything themselves, so few self-publishers achieve real financial success. However, it is possible to achieve personal success, and make a comfortable income while doing it—it's just that it is very hard work.

I've never taken a creative writing class, but I know people who have, and I know people who've taught them. One thing I hear a lot is that a great many people want to be writers, but very few want to write. It is not enough to want to be a game author . . . you must be willing to work at it, possibly for years.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

*We used to call the people who wrote RPGs "game designers"—now it seems that "Game Author" is more common. It seems to me that there is less system design and more background design going on these days, and that creating a decent game background has more in common with creative writing. That's a matter for another discussion, however.

Nov 21, 2005, Time

There are numerous aspects of the **Traveller** universe that present problems. When people ask about them, the only rational answer is that they must have been solved, but that I have no idea exactly how. One of these things is the notion of time:

The **Traveller** background assumes that the units of time are the second, minute, hour, and day that we all know and love. The problem comes (and indeed, it has already reared its ugly head) with worlds that do not have a period of rotation equal to the "standard day." Working with the Martian Rovers has already meant that scientists have had to devise a new name for the local day to prevent confusion with the terrestrial day. This is because it matters to the rovers (and those operating them) to keep track of day and night on Mars.

Every world, of course, is going to have a "day" of a different length, and every world is going to need to coordinate their clocks for various reasons—this is the reason time zones were developed . . . it's hard enough keeping trains on schedule without having to adjust for dozens of different (and often mutually contradictory) local times. There are good reasons to keep the same second, minute, and so on from world to world. Conversely, however, many worlds will also need to keep local time as well—farmers, for example, will need to work in sequence with the individual world "day."

Some worlds, of course, will not care where the local sun is in the local sky, and thus can simply declare the same time everywhere (we do this on Earth, for example, with Co-ordinated Universal Time, which is pretty much what used to be called Greenwich Mean Time). Trying to do equally-distributed time zones on world with a day that isn't equally divisible into standard hours, however, presents some problems. Do you have one zone of 58 minutes and 37 seconds? Or do you try to split the difference over all time zones? Some shift workers are going to get shorted . . . how do you handle that?

You can argue over the precise meaning of these little factors for weeks, and not come to any concrete conclusions (sometimes I think the **Traveller Mailing List** exists almost solely for arguments and/or discussions of this sort).

The powers that be in **Traveller,*** however, have not formulated any extensive regulations on the subject, preferring to leave such things up to individual referees/GMs. It is inconceivable that a society and government as extensive and as old as the Imperium in the **OTU** does not possess an extensive body of such regulations—indeed, the **Imperium's Ministry of Calendar Compliance** is charged with exactly this sort of thing indicates that there is an extensive body of laws and regulations that are not spelled out in print anywhere in the game. The problem has been dealt with in the game, but I (as a game designer, as one of the game's designers) have no specific definitions as to exactly how. This is, some think, a good thing.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This is a rather nebulous group that often includes your humble editor.

Dec 05, 2005, More Assorted Sundries

Another of my famous "potpourri" essays, wherein I discuss a number of topics of (presumed) interest to both of us. First, the readership may be interested to know I was hospitalized briefly over Thanksgiving, and had to spend the holiday itself flat on my back. I had a stent* installed to prevent one of my coronary arteries from closing, and save myself the cost and inconvenience of a heart attack. In the process, I discovered that my body has become resistant to my own insulin (my pancreas produces ample supplies, but my liver refuses to use it properly), and I'm now on a course of medication to correct that—hopefully within month or two I can stop injecting insulin. I am, however, going to have to monitor my blood sugar levels rather more closely than I have been. Anyway, I am also on a more restrictive diet than I've had to follow in years (diabetic/weight loss/low cholesterol) and I'm not an especially happy camper right now. The dietician went to great pains to point out that nothing is actually forbidden to me—I can eat almost anything, provided I am willing to make up for it in other areas. However, pretty much everything I enjoy is on that list of "Some trade-offs involved"—usually involving radically reducing the quantity and frequency of my old favorites. On the plus side, I can eat all the lettuce I want.**

The question of interstellar trade has once again reared it's hydra-like head over on the **TML**, and discussion continues on what "reasonable interstellar trade" actually consists of. As often happens, the various participants have talked for several days without noticing that their premises on the basic costs of interstellar travel did not match, so they have only recently noticed that they have been arguing past each other for days. I can't think of a single F/SF author, past or present, who can completely satisfy the requirements of the fanbase regarding the economics of a fictional world. Fan discussion of **Middle Earth** usually gets around to trade sooner or later, and I have seen economic issues raised with regard to C. S. Lewis' **Narnia Books**. Nothing really new here—in the 1970s, I read a mimeographed newsletter on Robert E. Howard's **Hyboria**, and the vast majority of the discussion there was shredding the world's economic basis. Thousands of words were spent discussing a single phrase like "there is little profit in trade with the wary sons of Shem . . . " and what that meant to the larger economic picture. For whatever reason, authors are loathe to develop a detailed socio-economic picture of their fictional world before getting on with the business of telling a story. I think part of the problem is that a certain type of reader wants to believe in every single detail of a world, indeed, they seem to need for every "i" to be dotted and "t" crossed in order to completely enjoy the stories.

From the gaming side of things, however, there is less mystery: gamers . . . **Traveller** gamers, anyway . . . often seek to squeeze every Cr0.01 to be milked from trade among a given group of worlds, and want everything spelled out. These folks are the econ versions of the gearheads (I've touched on them before) who want every cubic inch/centimeter/cubit of their vehicle/starship to be "fully-utilized."

As for myself, I understand the motivations of these fans. I even share them to an extent. Nevertheless, I try to stay out of the discussions, as the depths of my ignorance are too easily plumbed.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* A little mesh tube that is used to brace the artery open and keep it from clogging.

** I leave it as an exercise to the reader to determine the quantity of lettuce I actually want to eat—it is not large.

Dec 19, 2005, *Tempus Fugit*

For the Latin-challenged among you, this phrase translates as "time flies" (which have no relation to fruit flies*), and I propose using it as kickoff for a short discussion of **GDW**'s various efforts to produce time travel RPGs.

One notion revolved around introducing time travel into **Traveller** to allow publication of a series of "settings" in the extensive background history we had developed. Players could have adventured during the Third Frontier War, for example, or during the Civil Wars. For a variety of reasons, this did not happen, but the main one was that we felt our customers would be irritated by games which rendered almost the entire body of work in the **Traveller** universe obsolete. Players usually want to accomplish something major, and major changes in the timeline would have invalidated the increasing number of sourcebooks **GDW** had published over the years.

With the creation of the **Rebellion Era**, and the publication of **MegaTraveller**, the potential for an alternate timeline (sans rebellion) was created, but **GDW** never went down this path. A large number of fans have mentioned their intention (or at least their desire) to run campaigns where time travellers managed to prevent the rebellion somehow (GT players often have their temporal repairmen involved in the assassination of Dulinor).

Totally unconnected with **Traveller,** I toyed with a number of possible time travel themes for RPGs, but the "powers that be" (or "powers that were," if you will) at **GDW** never saw fit to give the go-ahead for their development. One game would have involved the notion that there was no future—something causes civilization to end sometime in the next few months (travel beyond a certain date in the future reveals nothing but smoking rubble anywhere on Earth). The players would have a limited amount of time and resources to determine what happened and prevent Armageddon. My notion was that each adventure would have a number of possible outcomes, and that each outcome would be rated according to the number of points toward or away from the desired result. Players who goofed up completely could try again, but since the rules of the game impose severe penalties when two versions of the same person come into contact, the players would have to try something different each time. The notion of several different versions of the same group of troubleshooters all running around at the same major historical event, sometimes at cross purposes, sometimes merely trying to fine tune events (all without coming into contact), seemed to me to have great potential for a game.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This is a reference to the famous saying "Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like a banana," often used as a demonstration of how truly confusing the English language can sometimes be.

2006

Jan 02, 2006, Big, Small

First of all, let me extend my best wishes to all JTAS subscribers for a happy and prosperous new year, even though by the time you read this it will already be 2006. The TNS announcement is (will be?) a Holiday message from the Emperor and time marches on in the Traveller universe.

I have noticed that an increasing Traveller fans are professing an attachment for a version of the game that takes place in a smaller, more intimate version of the OTU—called by Chris Thrash and others the "small ship" universe.* The original game (at least Marc's original intent) was created for a game comprising a few subsectors, a sector or two at the most. Interstellar polities were supposed to comprise a few dozen star systems.

The potential for RPG adventures is much greater in this smaller background. There is no omnipresent Imperial Navy to interfere with the activities of ethically-challenged smallcraft operators, no huge level of Imperial bureaucracy to suppress adventure potential. Small ships mean small crews, and more opportunities for character interaction.

It was only later on that fan demand (caused, no doubt by the Star Wars movies) caused Marc to create the Third Imperium background—the 11,000 worlds. What is interesting is how some of the same fans who wanted the vast canvas of the Third Imperium are now attracted to the smaller, more intimate framework of what some call the "original" universe. I think at least some of this is due to the fact that a lot of the original Traveller fans came from GDW's established customer base, who were wargamers converted to role-players. As such, there was a demand for larger actions, involving fleets of starships which grew larger over time. GDW published Trillion Credit Squadron along with Fifth Frontier War, Invasion Earth, and other games that allowed players to be flag officers or high governmental officials, directing vast forces in mighty military campaigns.

The desire for lower level games is a return to the roots of RPGs, but this trend is pronounced in recent trends in wargaming as well (but that's a matter for another discussion).

My own preference is for games that involved less than a half dozen player characters, no more than twice that number of non-player characters, and a sector of worlds at most. I am not opposed to large starships, but I like to keep the action on a low level. I realize that not everyone feels this way, and I'm curious to know how the JTAS readership feels. I refer you to this issue's poll . . . :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, JTAS

* Interstellar spaceships of less than 5,000 tons, which was the top limit of the design system in Book 2: Starships. Some people feel that this was the perfect situation, but there seem to be an equal number who prefer the "Happy Fun Ball" fleets.

Jan 16, 2006, Epic Games

A great many **Traveller** fans enjoy so-called "epic" adventures and campaigns—where events and their repercussions are enormous, and the characters either represent powerful forces or are powerful themselves. Part of this is endemic in role-playing itself, but part of it was encouraged by **Traveller**'s designers. Marc Miller and the **GDW** design staff were wargamers and wargame designers before they were RPG designers. We were all used to commanding armies, fleets, and sometimes entire nations.* In the early days after **Traveller** was published, Marc toyed with the idea of a board wargame linking high- and low-level characters. The players (up to six) would represent the flag ranks in a war, but each player

would also have a low-level character (his initial notion was that it would represent an offspring in the military) that would try to survive the war. **Traveller** came out almost simultaneously with the movie **Star Wars: A New Hope,** which showed the actions of a small band of heroes—with major strategic implications.

Another product where players were encouraged to take high-level roles was **Trillion Credit Squadron**—at least in the campaign version. Players took the roles of admirals in a situation calculated to produce numerous interstellar naval actions. The game was very popular, and encouraged **Traveller** fans to play high-level characters. Reinforcing this notion were Marc's suggestions for solitaire play: if you couldn't get together with others and play Traveller as often as you liked, it was perfectly acceptable to create worlds, complete with economic systems, armies, and interplanetary and interstellar fleets.

In a different way, however, **Traveller** encouraged epic adventures in the mercantile system. Certain players found vicarious trade and commerce to be equally as interesting as looting subterranean labyrinths.

GURPS Traveller allows for epic-scale adventures, but tends to focus on the RPG side of such things, rather than the wargaming aspects (this is intentional, as SJ and Kromm will attest). In recent years, I find myself more attracted to the low-level adventures, especially as scenarios for skirmish miniatures games. Interestingly, so does Frank Chadwick—I wonder if it has anything to do with getting older.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of our more popular recreations was a game Frank put on periodically. Each player took a nation in **The Europe of 1745**. The game involved politics, war, economics (on a limited basis . . . mainly involving raising and supplying armies), and negotiation. We took a room in the local university union (with the aid of the university games club and their faculty sponsor . . . who loved to play Poland, since he was of Polish descent), and spread out a huge (8' x 12') map of Europe.

Jan 30, 2006, Test of Time

Recently, one of my fans gave me a belated Christmas gift: the first season of the TV series **The Rockford Files**. For those of you unfamiliar with this classic series, it was a detective series that departed from the norms for the genre (the hero rarely carried a gun, usually managed to hurt himself more than the bad guy when he got into a fight, and was constantly behaving in a manner most RPG players would consider craven), and set new standards for what good television could be. The show ran from 1974 to 1980, and it was a favorite with the **GDW** staff.

I bring this up because, as I was watching the first few episodes, it struck me how the show was timeless . . . despite the cars, the fashions, the hair, and the technology,* the show is as entertaining today as it ever was. The plots do not require topical references or inside jokes to understand. They deal with things that have always mattered to human beings: love, money, honor, revenge, and so on. Some TV shows are trite and dated within minutes of their first broadcast, most don't have any real attraction after one or two viewings. Things like Rockford can be savored repeatedly without growing stale because the stories are so well-crafted.

As a poster to the **TML** recently commented, the works of H. Beam Piper (and other SF authors) are still popular despite the fact that they have building-sized computers, a noticeable lack of lasers and nanotechnology, and no mention of clones or DNA. They are,

to paraphrase the poster, story driven rather than technology driven, and remain enjoyable decades after other authors have been long forgotten.

The background of **Traveller—the Third Imperium**—has proven to be similarly timeless. I leave it as an exercise for the reader to determine why.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Computers use punchcards and reels of tape. The bleeding edge of telecommunications tech is an answering machine, which features prominently in the start of each show.**

** During the opening credits, the camera panned over Rockford's cluttered desk, while the phone rang. The camera focused on the machine as it answered: "This is Jim Rockford. Leave your name and message after the beep, and I'll get back to you." Each week, there was a new message that threw a new light on Rockford's character ("Jim, this is Amy down at the market . . . it bounced. You want me to tear it up, send it back, or put it with the others?") but didn't always have anything to do with that weeks episode.

Feb 13, 2006, "I Don't Think We're In Kansas Anymore, Toto*"

* The headline, of course, refers to the movie **The Wizard of Oz**, and is Dorothy's (rather understated) observation that she and her little dog Toto are no longer in a familiar place. **Traveller** referees and gamemasters must often deal with the question of how to indicate to their players that they have come to a strange and new world. The players usually depend on the referee's verbal descriptions for their cues, supplemented by written information and a few pictures or deckplans. All you want to do is have a disconnect from the normal flow of events . . . something to make the players pause for an instant and think "that's odd." Here are a few suggestions, based on my meager refereeing experience.

Social Cues: How people behave varies tremendously from place to place. Greeting rituals of Western society are not universal . . . one of the easiest ways to say "this is an alien culture" is to change the greeting from a handshake to something else. Perhaps, instead of shaking hands, the inhabitants of the world in question clap their hands rather like an American "high five" (accomplishing the same purpose as the handshake—showing that one's hands are empty). Alternatively, perhaps the locals place their hands, palm out, on their foreheads in a sort of salute.

Other minor changes in manners and mores can accomplish the goal: greetings, partings, where you stand when conversing, what you do with your hands in various social situations, etc. In Japan, it is polite to remove one's footgear when entering a house—what other minor behaviors would be common on other worlds? Perhaps visitors receive moist towels to clean their hands when entering?

Physical Cues: Something as prosaic as a doorknob can do the trick—what if knobs don't twist, but must be pulled to open the door. What if the windows are always round instead of rectangular? What if the plumbing does not work as expected? A little searching on the internet can supply numerous examples of non-western toilet arrangements.***

As usual, non-western cultures and past societies can be a fount of ideas . . . unless of course, your players are from a non-western culture. In that case, the American way of doing things will serve as the "oddness indicator."

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

*** Consider the fun resulting from the schtick about "the three sea shells" in the movie **Demolition Man**.

Feb 27, 2006, Sources

To save the readership the bother of hunting them down, here are the results of the last two polls:

"What is the <u>newest</u> literary inspiration you have used in an RPG session?"

Less than a year.	44%
1-5 years.	35%
5-10 years.	10%
10-50 years.	7%
50-100 years.	1%
More than 100 years.	1%
More than 1,000 years.	1%
Other (inform editor).	3%

"What is the <u>oldest</u> literary inspiration you have used in an RPG session?"

Less than a year.	0%
1-5 years.	0%
5-10 years.	0%
10-50 years.	17%
50-100 years.	8%
More than 100 years.	25%
More than 1,000 years.	46%

The last two polls were to satisfy my curiosity about where **JTAS** subscribers took inspiration for their games. The answers held no real surprises, except perhaps the number of people taking inspiration from literary sources 1,000 or more years in the past. This consists of things like B**eowulf, the Song of Roland, the Bible, the Iliad/Odyssey**, and so on—things which are the foundations of Western culture—so I should have expected people to take inspiration from them.

Otherwise, the answers held no real surprises for me. When I was writing adventures back in the day, I drew from the same well as the readership, except that I seldom took a whole plot from a single source. One problem I encountered was that the people at **GDW** tended to be well-read, and would immediately leap on an intact plotline, no matter how esoteric the source . . . which would take much of the mystery out of the adventure. I had to mix and match plot elements in order to keep the players guessing, and I suspect that many **Traveller** share this problem with me.

For **76 Patrons*** I took bits from SF novels by Isaac Asimov, Andre Norton, and Poul Anderson, as well as mystery novels by Rex Stout and spy novels by Eric Ambler. I cribbed some stuff from William Shakespeare, and from assorted television series such as The Rockford Files. I even took a couple of "bits of business" from stories friends had told me over the years. The key is to always be looking for useful schticks, wherever you can find them.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* After all this time, I don't remember how we settled on the number 76 for the number of patrons included. I suppose it isn't really important, but that tends to be the sort of question the fans ask first.

Mar 13, 2006, My First Traveller Session

I must caution the readership that I have toyed with the idea of writing up the escapade as a short story, and may be conflating the fictional elements with the actual (if one can use that word in relation to an RPG session) events. Frank Chadwick was refereeing, and Marc was an observer, hoping to refine the rules.

My character, Henson Stringfellow, mustered out of the Army (there was at the time no such thing as the Imperium, so it was not the Imperial Army), and ended up on a world I'll call Bayland (for no particular reason I can't remember the name used in the adventure). John Harshman's character* had been a Scout (I think) but ended up with mostly combat skills, Henson had accumulated pretty good forward observer skills (in addition to some good combat and commo skills, so I decided he had been an FO during his time of service. For reasons which I no longer remember, we hired out as hunting guides to a spoiled rich kid (SRK) and a collection of his indolent friends.

Our party then proceeded to the local wilderness, blissfully ignorant of the insurgency in the region, which the worlds government said had been eliminated. We were disabused of this notion when the air/raft I was riding in (one of two) was hit by a SAM** and forced down. We stayed aloft long enough to travel about two kilometers and came down in a wooded area. The air/raft containing Johns character and our patron (the SRK) departed the area.

I decided that the best thing to do was for me to try to ambush the approaching guerrillas before they got to the downed vehicle. My hunting rifle was a good snipers weapon, and I managed to drive off most of the attackers before gunfire from the crash site drew me back there. Another party of insurgents had moved in, and was about to overrun the party when Johns character and the second air/raft came to our rescue (John had finally prevailed upon the air/rafts pilot to return

. . . I believe a pistol was the key argument in favor of the proposition). The insurgents departed, and we loaded everyone onto the second air/raft.

After a rather dicey ride back to civilization, we discovered that John's character and Henson had made a powerful enemy the SRK, who did not appreciate that we made him look like a coward in front of his friends (it was he who urged the undamaged air/raft to leave the scene of the crash). We had also made a powerful friend the SRKs father, who was glad to get his son back in one (albeit humiliated) piece.

This adventure established several precedents. First, it began in a seedy startown bar (where we met the patron and his entourage while they were slumming). Second, it involved gunfire. Finally, the adventure had later repercussions. The local government received a vote of no confidence as a direct result of the incident, and several local politicos had no reason to like Henson and company.

All in all, it was an afternoon well spent.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I have forgotten the name of John's character.
** Surface-to-Air-Missile, for the acronym-impaired among the readership. The sharp-

eyed among you will note that there were no SAMs in the original LBB combat system . . .

Mar 27, 2006, What Is Roleplaying?

At a convention many years ago, I first ran across the accusation that **GDW's** roleplaying games weren't really roleplaying games. The accusation was first leveled at En Garde, but was eventually applied to **Twilight: 2000** and to **Traveller**.

En Garde, for those of you who don't know, was first published in 1975, and was **GDW**'s first effort at an RPG. Character generation was extremely simple, and there was no "task system" except for a few simple mechanics dealing with dueling, socializing, and carousing. There was no gamemaster, referee, or umpire. The object of the game was to rise in social status by prowess in dueling, by heroic actions on the battle field, and by being seen in the right clubs with the right people. Coming out right on the heels of **Dungeons & Dragons,** *En Garde* was immensely successful, and was so unique that it spawned no imitators (as far as I know).

Twilight: 2000, Space: 1889, 2300 AD, Dark Conspiracy, and **Traveller** all drew criticism because their rules focused on combat instead of character interaction. **GDW**'s design philosophy* was that interaction between characters was not something you needed rules for, but that combat and other physical tasks was.

Twilight: 2000, because of its subject matter, came under some criticism at the time for the implication that a nuclear war was survivable. **Space: 1889** was criticized because . . . hmmmm . . . I don't remember, actually. The consensus of opinion among professionals was that the game could not possibly have a big enough audience to survive, but there were other complaints as well. **Dark Conspiracy,** on the other hand, received one bad review that said it wasn't a horror RPG, but a combat game about blowing monsters away. And, as we all know, real RPGs do not deal with simply killing monsters and taking their gold . . .

My ultimate response to these accusations was incredulity. I feel that RPGs are defined by what is published and what people play as RPGs. Certainly *En Garde* and **Traveller**, as some of the "first horses out of the gate," defined what RPGs could be. Later games broadened the definition, of course.

The majority of **GDW**'s RPGs are still in print, if only in facsimile or PDF editions. **Traveller**, of course, remains available as **GURPS Traveller** and **Traveller D20** as well.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Which was, essentially, the design philosophies of Marc Miller and Frank Chadwick . . . the rest of us (Lester Smith, Tim Brown, and your humble editor) followed in their path (well, mostly).

Apr 10, 2006, Game Design 101: Fun and Games

I like to think that I learned to design games from two of the masters of the craft: **Marc Miller** and Frank Chadwick. They each have their own general philosophy of what makes a good game, and mine is a combination of theirs with a few additions of my own, and I discuss these from time to time—this is another installment.

First thing out of the gate, a game must be enjoyable. I almost wrote fun, but it occurred to me that the average RPG player has ideas of what constitutes fun that differ somewhat from the rest of the population. A fun game, for the population as a whole, brings up images of laughing children and colorful pieces on a board. What many RPG players

consider fun, the population as a whole would find insufferably boring, involved, overly complex, and/or violent.

Consider the almost ecstatic joy with which many **Traveller** fans delve into the minutiae of the game universe. There was a recent discussion on the **Traveller Mailing List** that involved trade routes, and whether these were identical to X- boat routes, or sometimes followed X-boat routes, or bore no resemblance to X-boat routes. The discussion ranged wide, and eventually brought the comment from one participant that the game rules were insufficient to recreate even the simplest of economic systems—and implied that this was a major flaw in the rules. I have spoken before of my profound disinterest in the science of economics (beyond the bare minimum to function in modern society and to apply to my historical studies). I have a slightly greater interest in sociology, and a large interest in anthropology, but I do not try to bring these into game designs to any great degree. It is a mystery to me how people can play entire campaigns where their characters do nothing but run from world to world, buying and selling, accumulating cash without interacting with much of anyone.

Marc intended for people to do this, of course. It was a way of making **Traveller** into a viable solitaire game, but it was never intended to be the totality of game play, as many have made it. Marc encouraged people to generate star systems, subsectors and sectors as well, but he intended the activity to be preparing for an eventual game. Many people still find it an end in itself.

So what makes a game fun for Loren Keith Wiseman, your humble editor? I like military actions, of course, which are more akin to skirmish miniatures games than RPGs. I like games where there is some character interaction, where knowing how a given person will react in a situation will give me an advantage. I enjoy playing characters that are fish out of water, to a small degree.*

The conclusion to be drawn, I think, is that to be successful, a game must be flexible enough, in both rule mechanics and background milieu, to accommodate the greatest number of points of view. **Traveller** achieved this, in all of it's forms, I think almost everyone can agree.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of my most enjoyable games was a **Call of Cthulhu** campaign set in the 1920s, where I played a hard-boiled former policeman-turned-adventurer named Michael Belker.** My notion for Belker was that he did not believe any of the "nonsense" that his fellow investigators did. I was determined that Belker would remain totally skeptical about otherworldly fungi and mystical monsters until he saw something that did not have a rational explanation. The campaign ended before the criteria were met. It was fun denying the testimony of my companions: "She was grabbed by a giant mushroom? Yeah, sure. Maybe I better drive from now on."

** The name and occupation were inspired from a character on the television series **Hill Street Blues,** but the rest came from elsewhere.

Apr 24, 2006, Game Design 101: Focus

Continuing my thoughts on game design:

RPGs, and especially SF-RPGs such as **Traveller,** are often seen as simulations. Early advertising of board wargames (by **GDW** and other companies) emphasized the simulation aspect of the games, and one of the pre-eminent wargame companies of the 1970s

was named **SPI**, for **Simulations Publications, Inc.** Since the vast majority of early RPG designers and developers were originally wargamers, it was only natural that the desire for simulation of the "real world" would show itself, even in fantasy games. Every milieu, even fantasy, needs to have verisimilitude—it needs to seem real to the readers/viewers/players.

This does not mean, however, that every aspect of the universe needs to be worked out in detail. Attempting to cover everything that can possibly happen in a particular universe with rules is an exercise in futility and (in my humble opinion) a sign of an amateur game designer.

What can be done to keep the level of simulation high is to focus in on what is important to the game system and milieu and either gloss over or ignore everything else. The problem was that **Traveller** was essentially **GDW**'s first RPG design. We were going where no game designer (at least none of us) had gone before, and everything was new—we were amateurs. In subsequent books, we expanded the character generation procedures for each service, adding new ones as well. We expended the combat system with **High Guard** and **Striker**.

Fortunately, no one had to use every one of these additional systems, and only a few even tried. Had we taken a different tack in the early history of the game, it would have been nearly impossible for any but a fanatical few to play **Traveller**. Fortunately, Marc decided early on that players and referees should focus in on what was important to their vision of the game, and ignore (or at least truncate) the systems for everything that wasn't important. This was part of Marc's notion that **Traveller** could be many games at once: mercantile, military, diplomatic, espionage . . . everything could be incorporated, but not everything had to be simulated in the same level of detail. People who wanted to revel in the details of interstellar trade could use **Merchant Prince,** and didn't have to pay attention to the rules outlined in **Mercenary** or **High Guard**.

More limited backgrounds, such as **Twilight: 2000**, followed the lessons we learned with **Traveller** and didn't try to be all things to all players.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 08, 2006, Throwaways

A throwaway, as I use the term, refers to an ephemeral bit of background information, created without detailed reference to the game universe and put forth with the intention that it need not necessarily effect the background as a whole. The main advantage of throwaways is that they add to the perceived reality of a game without requiring extensive research, and thus save design time.

Another definition says that a throwaway is something tossed out as part of an article, which has no connection to the main thrust of the article, and is disposable in the sense that it could be eliminated without effecting the article.

Used properly, throwaways are a highly useful tool in the designer's arsenal, especially when my definition is used. To create a throwaway, however, an author must be familiar with the universe, and have a good sense of what is and is not important to the background. A throwaway line in an adventure that talks about Archduke Norris prosthetic limb is one of those minimally invasive bits of information that don't change the basic **Traveller** background in any important way. Although it has never been expressly stated that Norris has an artificial limb, there is nothing about Norris that prevents him from having one that has just never been mentioned before.

The best throwaways, however, are those that add depth to a background without in-

volving major characters from that background. If John M. Ford's character Lothario Lochinvar Finger were revealed to have an artificial leg, it wouldn't change much of anything. Archduke Norris, however, is fairly important to the background, and shouldn't be messed with without careful consideration. Since my concept of throwaway tries to avoid anything that requires careful consideration, I am unlikely to allow any such throwaway lines concerning Archduke Norris.

A disadvantage of throwaways is that everyone wants to use them. Practically every writer has tried to get something of their own into the corpus of **Traveller** knowledge—the canon, as it is known. Most of the time, there is little wrong with this, but sometimes a writer will toss off some line that creates major continuity errors, or requires some incredibly convoluted explanation.

Another disadvantage is that people will sometimes grab onto a throwaway in unpredictable ways. I am currently monitoring a massive debate on a mailing list discussing another of **GDW**'s RPGs that is focused on a few sentences I wrote nearly fifteen years ago. Thousands of words are being written on the topic, and more man-hours are being put into the discussion of the throwaway than were put into its creation . . . by at least an order of magnitude.

I find it funny and tragic at the same time.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 22, 2006, Adventures in GDW's Early Days

At a convention many years ago, I was asked for advice in starting a games company. I replied that I did not have much experience in that sort of thing, since I had only done it once. There is nothing special about the business end of a game company—they are businesses like every other, and must be run as such.*

Game Designers' Workshop began as a joint venture between Frank Chadwick, Rich Banner, Marc Miller, myself, and a few other members of the **Illinois State University Wargames Club** (this was all circa 1972-73). The members of the joint venture contributed money to pay for the first print run of **Drang Nach Osten** (known as "**DNO**" for short, the first entry in GDW's famous Europa-series of wargames). Since I was a college student without significant financial resources, I was one of two people allowed to contribute a game design instead (**Eagles**) instead (John Harshman was the other, contributing his work on **Triplanetary).**

DNO sold well enough that **GDW** was able to pay off the joint venture contributors, and Frank, Rich, and Marc decided to form a partnership to continue publishing games, inviting John and myself as junior partners. Using the profit from **DNO, GDW** printed other games: *Unentschieden* (called **UNT** for short—the second **Europa** game), **Chaco** (Marc's game of the 1930s war between Bolivia and Paraguay), **Eagles** (my design), and **Triplanetary** (John and Marc's SF game, about which more later).

Frank and Marc shared an apartment, and for the first few months of **GDW**'s existence, this apartment served as **GDW**'s assembly facility, warehouse, and business office. The living room was filled with carton after carton of game components, and the kitchen table served as the assembly area. I would come over between classes** and help assemble games, stacking them wherever there was space. Every day or so, as we received orders in the mail, Marc would prepare the packages for shipment and load them into the trunk of his green Volkswagen beetle for transport to the local post office.

Two of the stories of **GDW**'s early days are both related to **Triplanetary,** and (to the

best of my knowledge) neither has ever appeared in print before:

The Giant Space Fly from Alpha Centauri

One of **Triplanetary**'s components was a sheet of acetate, which formed the playing surface. Players would draw directly on the acetate with china markers to represent the course taken by their spacecraft, and to keep track of fuel consumption. Because the acetate could not be folded without permanently damaging it, the game was shipped in a rectangular cardboard tube, about 4"x4"x28" in size, with the map and the acetate rolled up inside. One day, when assembling games, we discovered a sheet of acetate with a common housefly laminated inside.

At the time, the major gaming magazine was **Strategy & Tactics**, published by **Simulations Publications, Inc.** of New York. Their game reviewer was the famed designer and writer Richard Berg, and he had given **DNO** a glowing review earlier in the year, and entered into a correspondence with **GDW** on topics of mutual interest.

When the time came to send Richard Berg a review copy of **Triplanetary,** we enclosed the fly sheet and noted on the outside of the box: "Special Scenario in this box: *Giant Space Fly from Alpha Centauri*!" Berg's reaction in print was low-key, but he was greatly entertained.

The Great Triplanetary Landslide of '74

As **GDW** product line grew from one game to five, space began to get short. We began to stack assembled games in closets, cabinets, and wherever else there was space, including the hallway leading to the bedrooms. As more products accumulated, the space in the hall became narrower and narrower, and I was obligated to shuffle down it sideways. Marc, however, was thin enough to be able to navigate the passage normally. Marc had a tendency to run, even inside, preferring not to waste time in transit, and often dashed down the hall, headed to/from his bedroom or the apartment's one lavatory.

On one occasion, Marc leapt up from an assembly session and dashed down the hallway. Frank and I heard his footsteps galloping along the carpet, then the sound of falling cartons.

We investigated, and found Marc on the floor, buried under a huge pile of **Triplanetary** boxes—unhurt, and laughing uncontrollably at his own predicament. We dug him out, and began to discuss the possibility of renting an office. Shortly thereafter, we rented the upstairs office space that was to serve as **GDW**'s main offices for nearly two decades.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are dozens of books available on starting and running a small business, and I suggest that those who want to do so avail themselves of the services of the local bookstore/library.

** Both John and I were still attending ISU—I had taken a B.S. in History in 1973, and was puttering around as a graduate student, since I had abandoned my original notion of teaching high school.

Jun 05, 2006, Lost*

My musings this time around have nothing to do with the TV show of the same name

(although I do watch and enjoy it). I'm concerned here with so-called "Lost arts"—things people did in the past that we don't know how to do any more. The classic lost arts tend to be things that required high levels of craftsmanship . . . Damascus steel, the colors in medieval stained glass, Stradivarius's musical instruments, and so on. Others are along the lines of "The just don't make 'em like they used to," which is sometimes just a nostalgia for the days of our youth. Then there are the crackpot theories—the mystery of the pyramids, for example.***

There is a tendency to assume that things like this don't happen in today's modern world. After all, we are the information society, aren't we? Everything we know how to do will remain known for the rest of eternity, right?

I'm not so sure. Consider *Liederkranz,*^**** the ultimate American cheese (according to some). *Liederkranz* is (or, more properly, was) a soft cheese, one of a type that includes *Stilton, Brie,* and *Schlosskässe.* Created in 1889 by a worker at the Monroe Cheese Company in Monroe, New York, *Liederkranz* had the soft, creamy texture of it's brother cheeses, but an aroma and flavor all its own, one that has never been imitated. Mention "American Cheese" to most people now, and the only thing that comes to mind is that processed, artificial orange, waxy stuff that passes for cheddar in too many places. *Liederkranz*, sad to say, is no more.

Why? Evidently by accident. *Liederkranz* was an acquired taste, and was never produced in huge quantities. The Monroe Cheese Company was sold to the Borden Company in 1929, and Borden continued to produce all that the market demanded (which, granted, was only enough to keep one factory busy). *Liederkranz* continued to satisfy gourmets and ordinary citizens alike for more than sixty years, until the era of leveraged buyouts and corporate restructuring. Borden sold its natural foods division to Genera Foods in 1982, and General Foods was acquired by Phillip Morris in 1985, to be folded into PM's Kraft Foods division a few years later. At some point during this period, *Liederkranz* vanished.

Cheese, you see, is a product of a natural process—the specific microorganisms in each type of cheese are responsible for the unique qualities of that variety, and even the slightest variation or contamination can result in something totally different. The original microorganisms in *Liederkranz* were discovered essentially by accident, and passed on from batch to batch by saving back a "starter culture" to re-infect each new vat of milk. When General Foods stopped making *Liederkranz,* the culture was lost or disposed of. Nobody knows how:

"The decision was apparently taken so casually that there is not even a record of it in the corporate archives."

John Steele Gordon, **"The *Liederkranz* Lament,"**
American Heritage, vol. 43, #3, May-June 1992

Unless there is a frozen sample of the cheese around somewhere, or unless some fanatic can recreate the same serendipitous discovery, the unique taste of Liederkranz is lost forever. We don't even have the excuse that we extincted a species or ran out of a vital resource—the end is so banal it almost makes you want to cry.

I leave the application of this to **Traveller** as an exercise to the reader.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Notice I refrained from any reference to the fact that this editorial will be appearing on the 6th of June, 2006 . . . 06/06/06.**

** Except here.

*** Don't get me started on the "mystery" of the pyramids ... there is no mystery in-

volved. Building a pyramid is simple: you pile stone blocks on top of each other, and gradually stop.

**** I almost titled this essay Take Me to Your *Liederkranz*, but I decided that would be too esoteric a pun.

Jun 19, 2006, Looking Back From The Year 2000 (Plus 6)*

Every once in a while, I look back on some of the things I wrote twenty (and, thirty or more years ago. I even have a few things left over from my time in high school* (I graduated in the year nineteen-hundred-and-don't-ask).

I attended Illinois State University in the thriving metropolis of Normal Illinois (twin to the larger city of Bloomington) and originally intended to teach high school, as two of my older siblings had done. As I came closer to graduating, however, two things occurred that would cause profound changes in my life. First, I discovered (through my student teaching experiences in the local lab school) that I disliked teaching intensely. I began looking about for other careers suitable for a history major with a biology minor, and discovered that these were limited to:

a) teach history

b) do something else.

I explored several possible "something elses," including professional model-making (a career with few openings and great competition for them), and even took the (for my generation) rather extreme step of applying to the Central Intelligence Agency. My faculty advisor had suggested the C.I.A. because they actively recruited history majors, and I went so far as to attend a recruiting seminar held on campus. The agent I talked to suggested I take more foreign languages, preferably Russian or Chinese, in addition to the German I had earned credits in. Most of the work done by the C.I.A. consists of reading foreign language journals, looking for intelligence tidbits, and preparing reports—very much the same thing I had been doing for my history classes. Given my immense lack of facility with languages,

Second, I ran across a flyer in the student union advertising the formation of a campus wargames club. I had played board wargames and tabletop miniatures games for many years, and I was overjoyed to find a group of people with similar interests. I attended a meeting, and became a regular—along with Rich Banner, Frank Chadwick, Marc Miller, and several others. One of the things the group did was come up with improvements to existing games, and create original games. A company called **SPI (Simulations Publications, Inc.**) of New York sold blank hex grids and die-cut counters, and many of us invested in these designer's supplies and waxed creative.

After a year or so, Frank invited Rich, Marc, and myself to join him in using some of the university's educational innovation funds to create **SIMRAD**, a student-run arm of the communications department designed to create custom-designed classroom simulations for the school. **SIMRAD** worked primarily with the history department, and created a number of educational simulations. These included a simulation of the U.S. presidential election of 1896, the Chaco War (1930s Paraguay vs. Bolivia), and the Salem Witch Trials. This represented my first formal training in simulation design, and laid the groundwork for a career in games that I have followed ever since.

I am almost universally ashamed by what I wrote more than three decades ago. I have improved vastly since that time, and I like to think that I continue to do so. I'm hoping that the stuff I write thirty years from now will be really fantastic!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of the earliest "SF" novels—written in 1887(!) was titled **Looking Back From the Year 2000**, by Edward Bellamy.

** About 1988, I found the manuscript of my first novel—I started on it when I was 16 and finished a rough draft and six "final" chapters before moving on to something else. Looking back, it was so horrible I destroyed it, and I have no regrets. There was very little in it worth saving, and what little there was, I can remember.

Jul 03, 2006, Good Guys and Bad Guys

Working at **GDW** meant that I absorbed a great deal of the design philosophies of Frank Chadwick and Marc Miller. Many of these are still with me to this day. The "**GDW** Approach" to Good Guys and Bad Guys is one of the lessons I have retained.

Marc and Frank believed that no one was a villain in their own eyes—everyone thinks of themselves as one of the good guys.*

When creating adventures, it is tempting to do the bad guys as two-dimensional caricatures. Frank once remarked that it was too easy to take the vaudeville approach, giving (mentally at least) the villain a black hat and a mustache to twist, like the stage villains in low-brow stage shows (parodied by animated cartoon characters like Snidely Whiplash**).

The main principles of creating bad guys:

They always have reasons that make sense (to them, if no one else) for everything they do. They may very well be sociopathic, but they do not act at random. They do not pursue evil for it's own sake, but for some tangible reward.

They are more believable if they have flaws, weaknesses, and foibles. They can have irrational fears and superstitions, whether or not these prove to be their ultimate downfall.

They should be human in their own way: They should have parents, friends, and/or loved ones. One of the best villains was J.R. on the old television series **Dallas**, who was almost ruthless in most ways, but had his limits: he would not murder anyone, and he would not do anything to hurt his immediate family (even if he had no scruples about keeping them under his thumb).

They should not be bumbling or incompetent, unless you need comic relief. There is little pleasure to be had from outwitting a moron, and the players will find it a hollow victory.

A really good villain should be a recurring threat. If the adventurers destroy him too easily, the adventure(s) will be less of a challenge. On the other hand, if he can never be defeated, the players will become frustrated with the game.

Good guys . . . hmmmm. I'll talk about them later.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This was for literary purposes, of course. Frank, Marc, and myself have strong moral views, although we each differ in specifics.

** For those of you who don't recognize this cartoon character, let me say that he comes from the fertile mind of Jay Ward, and leave the rest of the exploration to the readership.

Jul 17, 2006, "Those Crazy Ideas"

Many years ago, I read an essay by Isaac Asimov where he discussed the craft of writing, especially what he called **Those Crazy Ideas.** His point was something that, at the time,

I had trouble believing (but later came to accept): Ideas are easy. Good ideas are just a little bit harder to come by, but are still not that hard to come up with. In my years with **GDW** and **SJ Games,** I have probably had eight or nine good ideas (and several dozen bad ones) for every one that ends in a published product.

Ideas spring from every direction, and sometimes all I can do is jot down the basics on a scrap of paper (I have learned over the years that I cannot remember the details after any appreciable amount of time has passed). Frank used to note his ideas on legal pads, Marc sometimes used index cards, sometimes a notebook he always carried. One of the first things I noticed about Steve Jackson when we met (nearly three decades ago) was that he carried a small tape recorder for his note-taking.

I eventually transcribe my notes to a computer file, which I read over from time to time to see if the idea is still good, and if its potential has changed since the last time I looked.

GDWs first RPG was **En Garde!,** and the game came about for three reasons:

Everyone at **GDW** had been infected by **Dungeons & Dragons** when the game first came out in 1974. Every one of us had been tinkering around with variations on the theme, but nothing much came of it initially. We had determined that RPGs were a potential gold mine, and that we should do one, but we didn't want to duplicate **D&D** too closely. The second factor was that one of our employees, Darryl Hany, was a fencing enthusiast, and had devised a simple system for recreating duels in game form.

The third factor was the fact that Frank quickly became bored with the fencing system, and created some quick and dirty rules to generate reasons for the duels . . . we had all read Dumas' T**hree Musketeers**, and within weeks, we had created paper personas and were all involved in creating increasingly complex interactions to generate reasons for dueling, all based on the literary universe of the novel.

Almost instantly, we found the social climbing and political maneuvering were vastly more fun than the duels, and **En Garde!** was born. The inspiration was a common interest in games and gaming, coupled with a deep interest in literature (in this case, from the action/adventure genre). To refine the mountain of the raw ore of ideas into a few ounces of precious metal, you must be willing to discard an enormous amount of dross. Knowing what to discard and what to keep is a matter for judgment and experience—but you must also have the huge pile of ideas to mine.*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The readers will note that I have no footnotes this time around . . . except this one.

Jul 31, 2006, Musings

Like Andy Rooney on **60 Minutes**, I thought Id do a short discussion of things about **Traveller** fandom that I find interesting and amusing from a personal viewpoint. People who recognize themselves in these vignettes should not take offense nor feel personally singled out you are not the first person to do any of these things, nor will you be the last.

Something that used to puzzle me was the nervous excitement people exhibited when approaching me at a convention or when visiting the **GDW** offices. People became tongue-tied, jumpy, and clearly agitated at merely speaking with me (or Marc or Frank). As the years passed, however, I saw something very interesting: even celebrities behave this way towards people they admire/respect. I have observed famous SF authors (in the green rooms at SF conventions) become nervous and tongue-tied when talking to their favorite author(s). It is very amusing for me to watch people I respect and try to emulate falling to

pieces when confronted with one of their gods. It makes me feel less self-conscious when it happens to me (which it still does . . . I manage to put my foot in my mouth about 1/3 of the time I meet a celebrity).

I am constantly surprised at the extent to which people seem to think that **GDW** had unpublished products simply lying about. Now a year goes by without several fans asking if I have any unpublished manuscripts for **Traveller** (or one of the other games I was involved with). I had things I wanted to do for **Traveller** that never saw the light of day, but most of these (with the exception of the **Clipper Book** for **TNE**) were either nothing more than a nebulous notion carried in the back of my mind or have already been incorporated in some way into one of the published **GURPS Traveller** products (one of these is the **Modular Cutter Book** and **Deckplans**).*

An alternative (but equally common) question is Were there any plans to [insert pet project here]? or Could we see your outlines/notes/preliminary thoughts on [pet project]?

Several times a year, I get asked about how various words connected with **Traveller** are pronounced. What amuses me no end is the notion that there are a few words used in connection with the game that I have never actually spoken aloud—I know how I would pronounce them if I were to do so, but the occasion has never arisen when I have needed to say (for example) Al-Morai. Isn't that interesting?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I do have extensive notes and deckplan designs for the clipper book, but these are 1) incomplete, 2) unpublishable in their current form, and 3) trapped on an obsolete computer system that will require considerable effort (mental and physical) to even access, let alone prepare for publication. I have hopes of whipping them into shape someday, but something always seems to intervene.

Aug 14, 2006, A Minor Mystery

Once in a great while, I speculate about what exactly it is about **Traveller** that appeals to the fans. The game has been through several different rules systems, so the attraction of rules mechanics can't be 100% of the answer. **Traveller** has one of the most fully-developed background histories of any RPG (not just SF-RPGs) . . . I recently ran across a forum discussion of **Traveller,** during which one of the participants claimed it had a more extensive and better developed history than **D&D**.*

What this got me thinking about was this:

If I were not involved in the design of RPGs, which RPGs would I be interested in?

I had to give this some thought. My primary hobbies are history and miniatures games (board wargames included), and I would have discovered RPGs through miniatures games (it is a poorly-kept secret that RPGs developed from miniatures gaming). The games that come closest to matching my other interests are, it seems to me:

Boot Hill: This one is out of print, but I doubt I'd let that stop me. I've always liked skirmish games, and this one is one of the earliest of that genre. My first game of **Boot Hill** was after my first game of **D&D**, but I have a vague memory of playing something about the same time called Colonial Skirmish by someone I remember as Steve Curtis (both of these are so long in the past I can't be certain of either name any more, however).

Call of Cthulhu: This would have come out of my reading of H. P. Lovecraft, and I suspect I would have played it for a while, but lost interest—I've never been especially fond

of the essential hopelessness of the **Cthulhu** mythos. After all, your character is supposed to go crazy.

Twilight: 2000: Assuming this would have come into being without me (which is debatable), I would have taken to it immediately.

Space: 1889: Likewise, assuming this would have appeared without my input (this is more problematic, but still debatable), I would have been all over it.

Traveller: Notice that I saved this one for last. I would have played and enjoyed this one, but I think I would have been slightly turned off by the complexity of the **MegaTraveller** design system, and would have focused on mercenary actions (reflecting my reading of the Falkenberg and **Hammer's Slammers** novels). I would probably have lost interest in **D&D**, especially after it became **AD&D**, and I doubt I would have returned to the fold with 3.0, 3.5, or D20.

Which would have been my favorite? It is hard to say . . . I'll need to give that question more thought. I have no doubt whatsoever that I would use miniatures for RPGs. I would certainly have tried writing some minis rules.

Perhaps I would have had enough free time to write more SF short stories?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'm not sure this is true, but it certainly sounds good.

Aug 28, 2006, Revisionism

For many years, some fans have approached me and told me how much they loved my work for **Classic Traveller.** A few have gone so far as to tell me that they think my best work was done for that game, and I have always been slightly insulted by that—it is as if they are telling me that I haven't learned anything in the last two decades. I like to think that my work for **Traveller** (and other games) has improved over the years. Its nice to receive a compliment, but simultaneously I can't escape the feeling that I'm being told that I haven't done anything significant in 20 years.

I have begun to wonder if George Lucas might not have similar feelings. People love **Star Wars*** with a passion that matches or exceeds that of **Traveller** fans. I am reasonably sure that the recent decision to release the original three movies (**A New Hope, The Empire Strikes Back,** and **Revenge of the Jedi**) on DVD in their original format is due to the demands of fans for the original, un-revised, Han shot first edition. Two decades have passed, and Mr. Lucas has made many other films. I am sure he feels he has improved since 1977, and wants a chance to correct what he sees are mistakes.

I can understand his urge to tinker with his work. I feel it myself. I am never completely satisfied with anything I have written, and I always want to make small adjustments to everything. I learned many years ago however, that reality means you have to let go at some point, declare a project as done as it is going to get, and move on.

The temptation to go back and tinker with previous work is strong. You have learned how to do things better, you tell yourself, so a revision is certainly in order, especially to those troublesome little things that only you have noticed.

I made a decision, however, to not try to fix my old stuff. I'm not really sure why, but the notion of constantly changing what I have already written makes me uneasy.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* By which I mean **Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope**—I cannot call it anything else without feeling silly.

Sep 11, 2006, Economics—Again

Recently, I was struck by a number of very interesting comparisons between a rather diverse group of interests: military diorama builders, model railroad enthusiasts, and **Traveller** players. I came to this by a rather roundabout route Steve* and I were discussing hobbies, and the subject of model railroading came up. I told him that I had concluded long ago that I might have become interested in model railroading had I not taken up miniature wargaming as a hobby. Many of the techniques of building model railroad scenery have direct application to the creation of wargaming scenics and terrain.** Almost all of the tools and materials of model railroading can find a use in miniature wargaming. Likewise, the military modeler can find much of use in model railroading.

My first effort at a diorama was a scene from the Battle of the Bulge, using a box of Airfix HO German soldiers, a couple of MiniTank HO vehicles, and a leftover spray can of Christmas snow. The MiniTanks catalog called them battle scenes (presumably because 12-year-olds were not likely to be familiar with the word diorama), and I soon branched out to North Africa and Western Europe. The modeling aspect of railroading appealed to me back then, and I suspect Id be a model railroader if I were not into wargaming. I once toyed with the idea of building a model of the small town I grew up in, as it would have appeared in 1856, shortly after it was founded. In this I am not alone—there are hobbyists who do nothing but make model buildings, sometimes entire villages.

There is an aspect of the model railroading hobby that is not commonly known to outsiders, however: the hobbyists model the physical aspects of the railroad, of course, but they also model the economic aspects. Running model trains in a constant loop around model terrain gets boring pretty quickly, and the hobbyists soon began simulating a model economy as well. A layout might include model factories, shipyards, coal mines, grain elevators, and so on all of them linked by miniature rail lines. The hobbyists run trains between these areas and model cities, shipyards, and so on. They drop off empty cars, pick up full ones, and carry passengers all according to strict time schedules (using scale model time). Some of them wear railroad engineer costumes when they operate their layouts . . . a form of LARP, if you ask me.

The computer age has brought new marvels to model railroading, enabling the hobbyists to simulate reality even more closely then before. I often wonder if a computerized economic simulation of railroad operations would sell to RailFans. And . . .

All of this reminds me of **Traveller** fans operating interstellar shipping lines, buying and selling, moving goods, and so on. Model railroaders don't keep track of the monetary value of the cargoes their trains carry—at least not that I know of. And none of them engage in vicarious speculative cargoes, but the similarities to **Traveller** are uncanny and thought provoking. Ply the spacelanes . . . ride the rails.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Surely I do not need to specify which one?
** For the lead pusher, terrain consists of things like model hills, roads, fields, and the like, while scenics are items (other than model soldiers/vehicles) that you place on the terrain, such as model buildings, fences, trees, haystacks, and the like.

Sep 25, 2006, In Memoriam: John M. Ford

Steve Jackson informed me earlier today (Monday September 25) that John M. Ford died very early this morning. He had no details, but **Traveller** fans will remember Mike (as he was known to his friends) as the author of numerous articles in the print **JTAS** as well as **SJG's GT: Starports**. In addition to his many other works in an immense variety of genres. Mike was a writer of rare talent, writing science fiction, game designs, songs, and poetry with equal facility. I had the immense privilege of working with him, corresponding with him for decades, and counting him as a close friend. The universe is reduced by his passing, and I and many, many others will miss him.

Sep 25, 2006, Star Wars Revisited

I recently acquired the newly released **Star Wars*** movies, and they gave me cause to reflect how those films changed my life . . .

And the world.

First, **Star Wars** helped **Traveller** become a runaway success. The movie captured the imaginations of thousands of fans, and many of those found **Traveller** the perfect RPG expression of what they loved about the movie. Marc had already done substantial work on **Traveller** by the time the movie premiered, but the movie had a major effect on the game, nevertheless, as I discuss here. **Traveller** would have been published had the movie never existed, but I am convinced that it would not have been nearly so successful. **Star Wars** and the other two films in the original trilogy, **The Empire Strikes Back** (1980) and **Return of the Jedi** (1983), made a fortune for many game companies by spawning a huge and organized fandom primed and ready to buy **Traveller** and other games.

More than helping to create the SFRPG genre, **Star Wars** altered Hollywood forever. **Star Wars** was the first major SF blockbuster, and paved the way for others. It was the first movie to exploit aftermarket tie-ins in an organized way. George Lucas made more money from licensing than he earned from the movie itself—by several orders of magnitude. Finally, although the special effects (FX) seem dated nearly three decades later, they were a major advance in the state of the art in the 1970s, and **Industrial Light and Magic** (the company founded by George Lucas to create movie FX) changed the way movies were made.

The new releases include both the original theatrical releases** of the three films and the revised versions that have received so much criticism from certain grognards. Seeing them again brought back the old excitement . . . even on the small screen . . . and made me realize again how lucky I have been over the years.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* OK, technically, the first one is called **Star Wars IV: A New Hope**, but I always feel silly calling it that. It will always and forever be **Star Wars** (plain and simple) to me.

** Taken from the laserdisc versions. Many people are a little ticked that they weren't punched up a little, but I am satisfied with them. They are no worse than the VHS versions I already own, and I wanted to get both versions on DVD—my VCR won't last forever.

Oct 09, 2006, Mike and Me

I knew John M. (Mike to his friends) Ford since ca. 1981 or so. He submitted a few articles the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society,** and our first communication was about

his personal requirements* and branched out to items of mutual interest: history, literature, gaming in practically all its forms, and many other things. I didn't want to be a fannish pest, so I stayed away from trying to talk shop about writing SF except for occasionally seeking his opinion on some plot idea for a game.

Mike and I first met at **ChiCon IV, the World Science Fiction Convention** in Chicago in 1982 (I think), and it was there that I first encountered his infectious personality, his evident joy in life—and his myriad health problems. We were to meet several other times, at SF and gaming cons, but I suspect we spent less than three hours face-to-face in nearly 25 years. Our friendship was primarily by mail, and I wrote his nearly 1,000 snail and e-mail letters.

Mike's snail mail letters always arrived with fanciful return addresses, sometimes in Mike's elegant calligraphy. I happened to see one of these labeled **Evil Geniuses for A Better Tomorrow** at the same time a catalog of assorted marketing and promotional items crossed my desk, and I ordered a couple of thousand customized pencils, which I distributed at several gaming conventions. I never did get the EGBT lollipops, but there are other things available here. I had EGBT letterhead made up, and still have a few sheets of it.

About 1986 or so, Mike and I began exchanging letters as if we were characters in the **Traveller** universe. I would begin each letter with a message from an Imperial public relations officer, taking a paragraph or two to describe some humorous event from court life. My approach was that the Emperor was barely capable of writing his name, and only through careful handling did he remain the respected public figure everyone in the Third Imperium came to know and love. I would talk about the problems of keeping him on topic during a speech, or how I dreaded the live appearances that were necessary from time to time. Mike would begin each letter with his adventures as an Imperial troubleshooter on the frontier, dealing with such things as Imperial Marines whose supply of recreational equipment had been mistakenly replaced with 10,000 recordings of **Glyp Dyffny and His Prosthetic Guitar play the Emperors Easy Listening Favorites** ("I was afraid of being killed . . . and then eaten!"). We continued this exchange for quite some time, and I think I saved most of his letters to me—they are somewhere in the cartons of papers from the **GDW** days.

Sadly, I did not save more than a smattering of his e-mails, something for which I am figuratively kicking myself even now. Each one bore one of his imaginative signoffs, so famous on **Pyramid** and elsewhere, and often the source of gut wrenching laughter. My last communication was about a month ago, and was, typically for us, a discussion of the newest releases to Bob Murch's **Pulp Figures** line. He remarked that he was thinking of putting on some **Rocket Corps vs Undead Cossacks** skirmish games.

Over the years, I learned several important things from Mike:

- Never give up. Regardless of what happens, do what you love, do what brings you satisfaction, and don't allow anything to dissuade you.
- Don't wallow in self-pity. Whenever I encountered a health problem,** I remembered that Mike's made mine pale to insignificance.
- Luck comes from people. Knowing people is good for you, and good things come to you from the people you know, so get to know as many as you possibly can.

Finally, Mike was a devoted member of the **Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library,** and made it a home away from home. An endowment fund has been set up in his memory, and I will be donating from time to time. The library purchases books annually from the interest on the endowment, and I understand over $3,000 has been raised so far. The fund is thus a continuing source of books for the library, which I think is a fitting memorial. Details can be found on the Friends website.

"Well. Hugs parallel to all my prosy robots. Remember me, forget death."

John M. Ford, **All Our Propagation: a Play for Instruments, from Speculative Engineering, MCMXCII**

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Mike asked if he could retain copyright on his articles, granting us first print rights. This was a departure from our standard editorial policy, but Marc, Frank, and I were all in agreement that established SF authors could be granted dispensation. As Frank said: If Larry Niven ever writes an article for **JTAS**, were not going to quibble if he wants to retain second serial rights. This is why you'll find a copyright notice with Mike's articles.

** Over and above the minor ravages of age, I am overweight, have high blood pressure, a minor heart arrhythmia, pre-diabetes, and a pinched nerve in my spine that causes occasional back and leg pain. Further, I suffered a minor coronary event (a near heart attack) in November of last year.

Oct 23, 2006, It was Thirty Years Ago Today . . .*

About this time, thirty years ago, Marc Miller proposed that **Game Designers Workshop, Inc.** publish a science fiction RPG, and passed around his outline for the basics of what would become the famed **Little Black Books**. Frank Chadwick was immediately taken with the notion, and the rest of us soon became infected with their enthusiasm.

After a few weeks of work, Marc had finished the first draft, and we began playtests. Frank refereed the first few adventures, with Marc observing and the rest of us** participating. The first games used a primeval version of the trade and commerce system, and winged interstellar travel (we had not yet worked out the details of starship design either).

By the end of the year, Marc had clipped drawings, photos, and paperback book covers to illustrate various aspects of the game (explorers, merchants, soldiers, and so on). One of the paperback covers was the original Star Wars mass market paperback cover . . . to his later regret, when he discovered the value of even worn examples of the book on e-Bay.

I was involved in the playtest, but my design efforts at the time were focused on a number of board games that never saw print. Only one of my efforts from that period ever saw print: **Pharsalus.** The others (a strategic level game of the **Vicksburg Campaign in 1862-63,** some preliminary work on **Tunisia for the Europa Series**, and a couple of other titles) have vanished into the mists. I spent a great deal of my workday dealing with shipping, as I was in charge of **GDW**s warehouse and game assembly operations, for which we rented a small storefront on Front Street in downtown Bloomington Illinois (which had been a political campaign headquarters during the 1976 elections, and was not in the best of shape). The building had three stories but we occupied only the first one, leaving the other two empty and largely unused.

Aside from participating in the playtests, I did not begin making significant contributions to Traveller until a couple of years later, when the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** was born and I was chosen to edit it. Within a very short time, I was replaced as warehouse manager, and began devoting more of my time to writing and typesetting various **GDW** products. The years from 1978 to 1985 were my apprenticeship in RPG design, and helped prepare me for my later triumphs (which included winning an Origins award for the **Twilight: 2000 module Going Home).**

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Yeah, I know . . . the real lyric is It was twenty years ago today. Sue me.

** Including a number of the local gaming group we hosted **D&D** sessions after hours in the offices, and it was easy to recruit them for playtests.

Nov 06, 2006, Regina Startown 2

This issue is entirely taken up with articles written with the intention of providing an introductory campaign setting for **Traveller**. The hope is that neophyte GMs and players will find the collection of ready-to-use adventures and the detailed setting will jumpstart their enjoyment of **Traveller.**

Headed by long-time **Traveller a**uthor and **Spinward Marches** expert Hans Rancke-Madsen, several **JTAS a**uthors have contributed to the effort, which has been many months in the making.

The phrase **Spinward Marches** first appeared in print in issue number 1 of the print version of **JTAS,** as part of an introductory paragraph to the **Annic Nova** article. At the time the article was written, there was only the most nebulous notion of a campaign background for **Traveller** and the idea of a linked series of new briefs called **Traveller News Service** that would lead to the **Fifth Frontier War** was still a couple of issues in the future. Each of us began working on articles for the new magazine, since we had to generate the first few issues almost completely in house*.

Shortly thereafter, Marc was looking for additional supplemental products, and the idea of a campaign setting book that would serve as a springboard for individual GMs to create their own adventures resulted in the publication of **The Spinward Marches.**

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The primary exception was the **Amber Zone** column, which was inspired by a throwaway line in an over-the-transom article: . . . because of this, the world has been classified as an Amber travel zone. This one notion served as the inspiration for the **Red-Amber-Green Classification System.**

Nov 20, 2006, "How Come You Never. . . ?"

As the 30th anniversary of **Traveller** approaches, I've been reflecting on several things, mostly the questions I get asked repeatedly. A sizable group of fans are curious why we (at **GDW**) didn't produce more **Traveller** products. A few are flabbergasted to discover that we never created UWPs and short write-ups for all of the 11,000 worlds in the Imperium, plus everything in **Charted Space**. The answer, of course, is that we had other things to do.

Marc Miller, using the **GDW** records, has calculated that we produced one product every 22 days for 22 years. In addition to **Traveller** in its various **GDW** incarnations, we produced a large number of products for **Twilight: 2000, 2300 AD, Dark Conspiracy, Space: 1889, and Cadillacs & Dinosaurs,** not to mention dozens of board wargames and other products.

Consider simply writing a page on each world in the Imperium. One page in the **LBB*** format was about 500 words, so we would have needed to create 11,000 x 500 = 5.5 million words. If Marc, Frank, John Harshman and myself had each produced 1,000 words a

day, the project would have taken well over 900 days—nearly three years with nothing else coming out. We could have divided it into sector books, of course, creating one of those per month until **Charted Space** was completely mapped. But, even if we had devoted our efforts to becoming **Traveller Designers Workshop, Inc.,** the company would have failed within a very short time. Game distributors at the time (and to this day) don't want to have too many similar products in the pipeline at the same time,** and would soon have ceased to stock **Traveller.** We could have continued by selling through mail order, but that would not have generated enough cash flow for all of us to earn a living, and we would have ended up working day jobs and publishing on the side. Frankly, I think **Traveller** was better served by a full-time game company producing other products in addition than all **Traveller** all the time.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* **LBB = Little Black Book**—the digest-sized format of **Classic Traveller.**
** Granted, **D&D** products were accepted by the distributors at that level of release . . . but the market for that game was much larger.

Dec 04, 2006, Advanced Degrees

All of the **GDW** design staff attended college, and most of them held degrees by the time they began working on Traveller. The gentle readers may find our educational specializations of some interest*:

Marc Miller: Marc majored in chemistry and minored in history, but took courses in most of the social sciences, focusing on history, but including political science and anthropology. He had a continuing interest in computer programming, and worked up a number of his own programs in simple BASIC. He had an interest in astronomy after graduating, and read widely on a variety of topics.

Frank Chadwick: Frank took a masters degree in communication and specialized in rhetoric and debate. He had a very good grounding in statistics and basic math, and a strong interest in history and the social sciences. Frank's interest in computers was purely utilitarian—he was interested in using them as tools to save time and energy in the design and production of games, but was not interested in programming.

John Harshman: John attended CalTech before coming to Illinois State University and majored in biology at ISU. John was our biology expert, and provided much of the detailed input for the original animal classification and encounter system in CT. John served as our hard science expert, and eventually took a doctorate in zoology.

Scott Renner: Scott was not actively involved in the design of **Traveller,** but playtested many products and assisted **GDW** with our computer programming. Scott wrote a custom business program that served our order processing and inventory software needs for more than a decade. He went on to attend the University of Illinois, and took a doctorate in computer science from that institution.

Loren Wiseman: I majored in history and minored in biology, originally intending to teach high school (why I did not is another story). I have a degree in history, and basic grounding in the social sciences (although I never completed my teaching certification before joining **GDW**). My interest in biology was primarily in vertebrate paleontology, and my graduate courses focused on comparative anatomy and paleontology. I found physical anthropology more interesting than cultural anthropology, but took advanced courses in both.

We all shared an abiding interest in science fiction, history, and games (especially wargames). Keen observers will note that we a rather light on the physical sciences, especially physics and advanced math.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Bear in mind that these are filtered through my memory, and subject to correction by the facts.

Dec 18, 2006, Conversion

Traveller GMs have a long tradition of using movies and TV shows as inspiration for adventures and campaigns. I recently obtained a copy of **High Noon**⋆ and watched it again for the first time in years.

The makers of the SF movie **Outland** clearly lifted major elements of the plot from **High Noon**, merging them with an actor equally as talented as Gary Cooper (Sean Connery in the case of **Outland**), and achieving a classic SF movie in the bargain.

The first step in this adaptation was to change the location of the action from a small town in the old west to a mining colony in the asteroid belt. The town was isolated, and the single rail line was the main way in or out. The mining colony was also isolated, serviced by a regular supply shuttle that took the place of the train.

Instead of the premature release of a murderer, **Outland** added a complicated backstory about corporate corruption and greed: the director of the mine was supplying the workers with highly addictive, dangerous, and illegal drugs in order to boost productivity. The mines federal marshal (Connery) uncovers the plot and begins investigating, which threatens to expose the whole thing. Hired assassins replace an insane killer and his drinking buddies, and the marshals wife leaves the mine early on (eliminating a plot element and the need for a major female star). These changes bring the plot and the action more in keeping with modern sensibilities—**High Noon's** plot is a little simplistic for todays audiences— and **Travelle**r players would find a direct transfer of plot points equally unsatisfying.

The main thing that the movie does not do that an RPG adventure must is make allowances for several protagonists. Movies require a single, steely-jawed hero and a few sidekicks RPGs require a team of (more or less) equal characters, each of which has unique abilities that contribute to the final triumph of good over evil. The conclusion of both movies is a climactic gunfight—something that is not out of place in an RPG adventure either . . . :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The special 50th anniversary edition. I learned a number of things from the commentaries, not the least of which was that the director and the screenwriter were both caught up in the House un-American Activities Committee blacklist. I already knew that John Wayne hated the movie, but I hadn't known that he considered the film un-American and nigh onto treasonous.

The main thing that jumped out at me, however, was this: Our hero (Gary Cooper) a town marshal, discovers that a dangerous felon who has sworn to kill him has just been released from prison. His first action is to pile himself and his new bride (Grace Kelly) onto a buckboard and leave town at high speed. Only after a few minutes does he realize that the villain will only follow him, and it will be better if he fights it out in town than risks an

ambush in the open country. I thought this was a nice touch the good guys first impulse is to get the heck outta town, which is the most likely reaction of a RPG player as well.

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Jan 01, 2007, Stargate Command and Me

For Christmas, I received a number of books and DVDs, including the first two seasons of **Stargate SG-1**.* I spent Christmas day and day after in a marathon TV session, and in the process, viewed the **SG-1** episode titled **1969**.

Spoiler Warning

Those who do not wish to have the episode revealed to them should skip this editorial. I won't go too deeply into the details of the plot, but I am never sure how much of a given plot can spoilt it for some people, so I choose to err on the side of caution.

So as to provide a little buffer space before getting to the meat of the episode, let me go into a diversion on the subject of fan fiction or fanfic (aficionados will forgive me if I misuse a few technical terms or bowdlerize a few concepts).

Fan fic is where fans of a literary genre create additional, unauthorized, and unapproved material for the thing they love (the concept, if not the name, dates back at least as far as Arthur Conan Doyle's **Sherlock Holmes Stories**). When in high school and early college, I was a huge fan of **Star Trek**.** I wrote stories set in that universe. Mine were pure action/adventure short stories, and I avoided the use of any of the named characters except as part of the background. My stories centered around a newly-commissioned Ensign Thomas Ryan, fresh out of **Star Fleet Academy** and serving aboard the destroyer USS Sulieman, and dealt with his education as an officer and a leader, (and thus also inspired by C. S. Forrester's **Hornblower Stories)**.

After a while, I ceased to do fan fic, and didn't give it another thought for years . . . until last week, when I viewed **1969** I won't go into the episode in great detail, but basically, SG-1 is accidentally projected back in time to August of 1969, where they encounter a young General Hammond, who has cleverly equipped the team with a note to his past self to help get them home. **SG-1** hitchhikes from Colorado Springs to NYC, passing through Chicago. There is a helpful map showing the teams progress, and I could not help but note that the team took old Route 66 from St Louis to Chicago.

In August 1969, I was a newly-enrolled freshman at **Illinois State University** in Normal Illinois, and was living off-campus in a small house that was about six blocks from Old Route 66, and a corner store/gas station that was frequented by students and townies. I had not yet met any of the future **GDW** staff by that point, but **Marc, Frank,** and **Rich** were all in town at that time.

I have never before been inspired to undertake a self-insertion into a story, but this particular event got my mind to racing, and I began wondering how I could have been reasonably introduced into the story.

It is simple enough to postulate that I might have encountered **SG-1**s magic bus in the gas station, or run into the team and their friends while grabbing a snack. Might I have overheard a conversation, or seen something I shouldn't have, necessitating the team taking me to NYC with them? I was pretty much useless as an 18-year-old, and had no skills of any use to **SG-1** in their efforts. The notion that I would tail the team and interact with them later as comic relief, finally stumbling onto the final solution to their problem and being instrumental in getting them home.

A more interesting possibility, however, is that I managed to get my hands on something that stuck with me for decades, changing my life, and driving me to seek out evidence of the **Stargate** and **Stargate Command**. And perhaps, in the later seasons of the show, coming back as a comic relief character . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I also got a really bad case of the flu . . . worst fever I've had in years, laryngitis so bad I could not speak above a whisper, and a chest that felt like I had inhaled a bushel of mohair socks . . . I am recovering, but not completely back on all cylinders.

** It is necessary to clarify: I was a huge fan of **Star Trek the Original Series** aka **ST:TOS**. When I was a fan, however, there was only one possible reference.

Jan 15, 2007, Inspiration

I spent last issues editorial taking about something that occurred while I was watching some of the DVDs I received for Christmas. It was a holiday in several ways: **SJ Games** was closed from the weekend before Christmas until January 2nd, and my day job* gave me several days off during this same period.

This was a good thing because, as I mentioned last issue, one of the things I got for Christmas was a really bad case of the flu, and I spent most of my holiday time wrapped in a blanket on the couch, sipping hot tea** and chicken broth. Since my head was pointed at my television, and I had little interest in college sports (televised or otherwise), I divided my time among two basic activities:

watching DVDs

falling asleep while watching DVDs.

During the holidays, I had an inordinate number of dreams (more properly, I remembered an inordinate number of dreams after I woke). Many years ago, I discovered that my dreams can often be used as a source of ideas for games, stories, and so on, so I developed the habit of keeping a pad and pencil near any spot in my home where I am likely to fall asleep, so I could note the dreams down while they are fresh. One thing I have noticed, however, is that a single dream is seldom a complete inspiration—I tend to dream in bits of business that need to be fitted together. I thought the readership would be interested in a small selection of the more unusual thoughts that occurred to me in my fevered condition:

I dreamed that I was hurrying along a snow-covered street in a small Midwestern city, desperately trying to get to my destination before the sun set. A wind was kicking up, and made walking difficult, but I eventually arrived at a huge mansion-like complex, behind a tall wrought-iron fence. Judging from the cars and street signs, the time was the late 1940s or early 1950s. I knocked at the gatehouse, a small window opened, and I was asked to present my credentials. After these were inspected, the gate was opened, and I was guided to the main building by a man in a heavy coat. The gate had a bronze plaque that identified it as the Moody Theological Institute, and noted that admission was by appointment only. Inside, I discovered that the place was more like a huge library, and that it was the worlds foremost repository of information about vampires, demons, mad scientists and other evils . . . row upon row of index card files, constantly being revised, updated, and cross-indexed by clerks. Huge rooms-sized WWII-era punch card computers were being used to analyze data and predict where e-e-e-e-e-vil would strike next. I remarked that the machines were almost identical with those that the census bureau used, and my guide answered: Yes. Where do you think they got the idea? At that point, I woke up.

I dreamed that I was moving boxes of canned goods and other groceries from the ground floor of a house upstairs to a large room being used for long-term storage. I finished carrying several upstairs, then decided to look out the front door of the house, only to discover that it was connected not to the outdoors, but to a gritty concrete loading dock, of the sort found at large grocery stores and the like. Further investigation showed that the loading

dock led not to an outdoor road, but to a dimly lit tunnel. I returned to the house, and made the further observation that each exit led to a different type of building: houses, hotels, university lecture halls, cavernous warehouses filled with all sorts of things, one-room sheds . . . and I remembered that every building was linked by a stargate-like wormhole, and there were only a dozen or so of us. I awoke before I could remember who us was.

I was in a lecture hall with a group of seven or so people, wildly mixed in age, condition, and body type. In the front of the room was a lecturer flashing a series of slides demonstrating that time travel was possible both to the past and to the future, but that teams travelling to the future had discovered that there was no future after December 2013—merely a vast, devastated wasteland of smoking rubble. Our task was to travel into the past and try to discover what it was that would lead to this disaster, and try to prevent it. I thought 2013? Isn't that when the Mayan calendar runs out? and then I awoke.

Mind you, I'm pretty sure I won't be able to use any of these ideas in a **Traveller** product, but I think it might make an interesting TV series—if I can come up with a few characters, some plots, and a catchy title.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For those who don't know, I am one of **SJ Games** numerous part-time employees, and also one of the contractors that Steve refers to from time to time, but I also have a part-time job as a bookseller at a national bookstore chain. In addition, I have several other irons in the fire, more details of which can be found on my website.

** For those who care: sometimes **Earl Grey**, sometimes **Constant Comment** (both by **Bigelow**). The chicken broth is from a jar of store brand bullion cubes I bought several years ago and keep for such occasions. I find hot liquids help loosen chest congestion and soothe the scratchy-throat sensation that often accompanies a cold.

Jan 29, 2007, IPs

Some people know this already, but I thought a short discussion of ancient history and intellectual property rights would prove of interest. There has been a recent discussion of copyrights on the **SJG** forums, and I thought I'd go into more detail here.

Some time in the late June of 1973,* **Game Designers' Workshop** was born. The original notion was a joint venture to publish a board wargame called **Drang Nach Osten** (the first in the **Europa Series**, later renamed **Fire in the East**), and several members of the **Illinois State University Games Club** kicked in money from savings accounts and such. I was given a dispensation, and allowed to contribute a game design (**Eagles**) instead of cash, since the plan was for the three principal partners (Rich Banner, Frank Chadwick, and Marc Miller) to continue publishing games after paying off the initial partners.

Part of the partnership agreement dealt with what was to happen when the partnership broke up . . . it was assumed that it would not last forever. All game designs and other creative work was done under a "work for hire" agreement, meaning that all copyrights and trademarks would be the property of **GDW**, and that our salaries would be the recompense for surrendering those rights. This is a pretty standard arrangement in gaming and other publishing ventures. Further, we agreed that when **GDW** ceased to operate, the rights would be divided up according to the amount of work each of us had done in a given project, and controlling interest in any given game granted according to each individual's share.

When **GDW** became **GDW Incorporated,** the articles of the partnership agreement were written into the company charter and by-laws, and a formula for determining the

level of contribution was worked out. The assumption was that **GDW**'s intellectual properties would have long-term value, and that they would continue to exist if the corporation dissolved (a not unreasonable prospect). The primary concern was to split up shares in the **Europa Series**, but by that time we had several other potentially lucrative game series, **Traveller** among them.

When **GDW** closed its doors, the IPs were divided up and we agreed that the majority "shareholder" in each game/game series would have control of what happened to that property, and would be in charge of paying royalties to the others if/when the games continued to earn money.

Frank got control of a large number of boardgames, several RPGs, and a share of practically everything else. Marc got control of **Traveller** and a few boardgames he had designed (such as **Chaco**). I got control of **Twilight: 2000**, and interests in **Traveller** and other games.

When Steve Jackson licensed **GURPS Traveller** from Marc's **Far Future Enterprises,** Steve hired me to write **GURPS Traveller,** and I still receive royalty payments from SJG for the second edition (which I also wrote). Since **SJG** pays **FFE** a royalty for the **GURPS Traveller** license, I receive a share of that royalty from **FFE**. Products that I write for **SJ Games** as an independent contractor also earn me a royalty from **SJG**, and **GT Products** get me an additional royalty from **FFE**. Further, the PDF Products that I sell through **e23** and elsewhere earn me profits, out of which I pay **FFE** royalties in accordance with my license.

Of course, I get to keep all the profits for anything I write that isn't for a licensed property. I have a couple of those that I'm working on.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* We decided that **GDW** was formally founded on 22 June 1973, because that was the date that Germany invaded the Soviet Union during WWII. None of us could remember the actual date, and we all agreed that 22 June was a close as any.

Feb 12, 2007, The Future

A few items that have come up in the **JTAS** boards, e-mail, or elsewhere, that I thought would be of interest, but I'll deal with only one today:

A question raised on the **JTAS** discussions was how long the founders of **GDW** expected it to last. I can't speak for the others, only myself, but in the beginning, I had no clue. In those days, I was in my early 20s, and usually didn't give much thought to things more than a year or two in advance. I had some dim thoughts of becoming a writer, and made the usual stumbling starts at short stories and novels. It was rare that I finished anything, and I only had one or two pieces I felt good enough about to submit. I spent most of my early days at **GDW** (from 1973 to 1978) doing a lot of little jobs necessary to the functioning of the company—I was the entire mailroom for more than a year, and eventually spent three days of the week overseeing the part time employees we hired to do assembly, packing, and shipping. When it was decided to do a magazine, Marc put together the first issue, and I gradually took over operations. I began writing editorials, then articles, then (because of my expertise with the typesetting machinery—at the time an IBM Electronic Selectric with a mag card memory unit) I began editing products. From there, it was a short leap to writing material for **Traveller**'s main products. Twenty years on, I can't remember off the top of my head which book with something of mine in it came first, or which was the first book I authored on my own . . . I leave that as an exercise for those with lists of publication dates and notes on which edition of what product was published when. I found that I had little talent

for system design, but that I excelled in background development and filling in details.

By the time of the publication of **Twilight: 2000**, I had become convinced that there were a few games that people would still be playing in 10 years, and the rest of the titles on the market would have faded away. I counted **D&D** as one of these, and also **Traveller**. I don't know where I plucked the figure of 10 years from, but it was probably the farthest into the future that I could conceive of at that time. Frank held the opinion that there were some games that people would play even if the publishers went out of business . . .

At various times during the years **GDW** was in existence, the notion of what we would take if someone were to offer to buy us out came up in casual conversation. We never had a serious offer, and our speculations were casual and off the cuff, but it is always nice to dream. My share of anything less than $510 million would not have been enough of a nest egg to live on—not for very long anyway.

Of course, one of our daydreams was what we would have done had a shoe salesman from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin offered us his game for publication.*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* He did offer it to **Avalon Hill,** after all.

Feb 26, 2007, Movies 2007

Most **Traveller** fans . . . indeed, most RPG fans . . . love movies. I, like many others, have been obsessed with motion pictures since a very young age. I can't remember the first movie I saw—I suspect it was on television, during a Saturday afternoon, and was probably a western, since my father's favorite films were westerns, especially those with John Wayne.* The first movie I remember seeing in the theater was **The Music Man**, but that was not my first visit to a theater, as I remember previous ventures, but can't put a title to them. What I do remember was pleading with my parents to be allowed to see it again. My father advised me that movies, sooner or later, always ended up being shown on television, and I just had to wait a year or two and I could see it for free. I was, of course, at the age where "a year or two" seemed like an eternity, but I did manage to see it again—and I now own it on VHS (but not DVD).

Over the years, I watched hundreds of films, some in theaters, most on television. At first, I had to view them when the TV stations decided to run them, on the family televisions (and in black and white, of course**).

Eventually, I graduated from college, helped found **GDW**, and bought a TV of my own. I remember waiting for the war of VHS vs. Beta to conclude, and eventually bought VHS player/recorder. Very soon thereafter, I discovered the joys of "format shifting" and could now record movies at any hour of the day or night for my enjoyment later. The proliferation of video stores and video rental stores made it possible for my consumption of home viewed movies to increase tenfold (if not more). Deciding whether to see a film in the theater or wait for the release to video became a matter of juggling priorities.

Now, of course, I have a DVD player, and it is time to wait for the dueling HD formats to settle out (and for the prices to drop).

The excuses we videophiles give for watching so many movies, especially if we have some pretense to creative writing, are many:

They give us inspiration.

They help us learn the craft of screenwriting/pacing/plot/dialogue/etc.

They are part of the cultural background of our society, and we are barbarians if we

don't submerge ourselves in them.

There is, however, one aspect of the videophile lifestyle that I have been battling for the decade since I discovered it in myself:

They are a subtle, devious, and colossal time sink. The hours I spend in the recliner (I am a lounge-potato rather than a couch-potato) are hours not spent writing, or planning, or creating (or exercising, for that matter).

Everything in life, I guess, involves some kind of tradeoff.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One reason I have so much trouble is that I can't distinguish my memories of early cowboy shows on TV and movies on TV . . . Gene and Tex and Roy and Rex were all over the (small) screen.

** Color television sets were extremely expensive when I was a lad, and few stations broadcast in color anyway. I remember a neighbor who bought a popular accessory—an acetate sheet that stuck to the screen by static electricity, and had a broad band of translucent sky blue across the top quarter and a similar band of light green across the bottom. The thing was supposed to give the illusion of blue sky and green grass, but it just made the whole thing look surreal when watching anything other than a golf match.

Mar 12, 2007, Looking Back 3

In the last few years, thanks to DVDs and (and partly due to the increasing availability of TV shows on DVD) I've had a chance to view again, for the first time in decades, several movies and TV shows that I remember fondly from years gone by. My reactions are mixed:

Combat: This was the seminal show for the military history geek. The show aired during the 1960s, and was shot in B&W, and for television, so it was on a budget (one of the savings that B&W allowed was the use of chocolate syrup instead of stage blood). Viewed through the lens of nearly 45 years, however, it was remarkably accurate from a historical standpoint, and pretty good television in the bargain. One episode that I remember from many years ago and saw again a few weeks ago was **Anatomy of a Patrol**, which guest-starred James Caan as a German sergeant. The teaser* set up the basic situation: a recon plane had gone down near the frontlines, and two squads—(one American, one German) were sent out to recover the film from the cameras. The remainder of the episode was alternating scenes of the two squads (and the two sergeants) in a duel for possession of the film (and the pilot, incidentally). It was a delight, and the series as a whole is an excellent source of military SF scenarios.

The Rockford Files: Only four seasons have been released so far, and I have not been able to rent the third or fourth seasons yet, but the show is every bit as good as I remember. James Garner is a good actor, and pulled off the low-key comedy required by the role of Jim Rockford with consummate skill. Modern viewers may be put off by the clothing and the cars, and the general lack of PDAs and cell phones, but the plots of almost every episode are a goldmine of ideas (perhaps the readership can guess which ideas I mined for **76 Patrons**?)

The Long Ships: I was a great fan of this film as a 14-year-old, but it has not made the transition to the 21st century very well at all. The script and acting are mediocre at best, and all in all the film doesn't seem as cool as it once did . . . unlike The Vikings, which is still a treat for me to watch. Neither film has much of utility for SFRPG scenarios, except in the most general of ways.

Greatest American Hero: I remember this with great fondness, but it doesn't com-

pletely stand up to the test of time. All of the elements of the show that I enjoyed mostly the basic comedy situation of an ordinary schlub who gets a supersuit that grants him amazing powers . . . but loses the instruction book, and has to learn to use the powers by trail and error—aided and abetted by his girlfriend/lawyer and an FBI agent with distinct (and mostly opposed) notions on the proper use of the suit and its powers. The scripts were good, and the acting generally workmanlike, but the restrictions of a series TV budget required special effects sequences that seem cheesy by modern standards. Overall, its a keeper, but the show doesn't thrill me as much as it used to.

Im not completely certain how much of the difference between my views of now and then is the very human tendency to view things through rose-colored glasses and the fact that my tastes and experiences have changed.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* A TV shows teaser is the few minutes that shows before the credits and the first commercial, and is used to interest viewers . . . hence the name.

Mar 26, 2007, Computing Power

A Meditation on Various Machines I have known.

The first personal computer I ever saw was a great hulking machine Rich Banner bought. I almost can't remember the name (it was a **Corona** I think, but don't ask me for the model number or any details*). It reminded me in some ways of the portable stereo hi-fi I owned in high school . . . it was portable in the sense that there was a handle screwed to the top. There was no separate monitor, the screen was revealed when you folded the keyboard/lid down. The operating system was on a floppy disc** that you loaded after turning the machine on. I never actually used this computer, although I watched Rich several times, and asked numerous questions.

The first machine I actually used was a **Radio Shack TRS-80**, aka the **Trash 80**, purchased by **GDW** out of company finds as a learning tool to acquaint the staff (all four of us) with computers. It had no disc drive (programs were loaded/saved to a cassette tape recorder), and I don't remember how the operating system operated. I wrote a number of simple Basic programs for this, mostly playing around and convincing myself that I did not possess the systematic mindset necessary for really high-class code. **GDW** never acquired any programs for this machine.

The first machine I actually bought was an **Atari 800**. The operating system was on a cartridge that plugged into a slot in the computer, and a number of programs (including a multitude of games and a word processor) were available on cartridges that could be plugged into a second slot. I bought a printer and a pair of disc drives*** for the machine. I continued my programming experiments, and played numerous games, most of which were duplications of Ataris console games, but I also had several by other companies: **Mule** was one of my favorites, but I liked **Seven Cities of Gold** the best.

GDW acquired two or three **Apple II**s (one of which our tech consultant, Scott Renner, configured to feed files to our **Compugraphic MCS typesetter**), and Marc began to immerse himself in learning to write simple programs. We also bought several IBM PC machines, for use by the business office and by the designers/developers who preferred PCs. The developers learned the mark-up language necessary to prepare the files for the typesetter.

My next machine was an **Atari 1040 ST**. This used 3-1/2 floppies, and was one of

three machines competing for the non-I**BM PC** personal computer market at the time: The original **Macintosh**, the **Amiga,** and the **Atari.** The OS for this machine was on a floppy, as were all the programs. I was distressed to discover that the monitor I had acquired for the Atari 800 would not work with the 1040, and I had to buy a new one. I bought a dot-matrix printer for the machine, a modem, and a second disc drive. I wrote a number of products on this machine, but did little in the way of programming. I had a number of games I enjoyed very much, including **Empire, Sundog**, and a dungeon crawl whose name I cannot recall by the same programmers as **Sundog**. I bought **Empire** at the same shop where I bought the 1040, set it up the instant I got home, and began playing. Time passed. I suddenly noticed that the sun had gone down, I was really hungry, and I had to urinate very urgently.

The modem enabled me to begin tentative explorations of the internet, mostly through on-line BBSs and GEnie, and something called the **Traveller Mailing List.**

Shortly after the publication of the **Desert Shield Factbook,** I used the bonuses GDW paid me to buy an **IBM PC** with an 80-meg hard drive (no giggles please), a 14400 modem, and a high-res dot matrix printer. I kept the **Atari** for games, and used the **IBM** for word processing and on-line use. It was about this time my brother began to make jokes about my spare bedroom, which he called **The Elephants Graveyard of Consumer Electronics** because that was where I kept the old- but-still-functional electronic devices I had acquired over the years.

GDW used **Apple Macintosh**es for graphics and typesetting, and PCs for word processing (**WordStar** at first, then **WordPerfect** and **MS Word** depending on the preferences of the individual designer/developer. We prepared books for publication using **Pagemaker** and an **Apple Laserwriter** initially, eventually sending manuscripts to the printer electronically. **GDW**'s offices were located in a building with very old phone lines, and we would have had to have paid a fortune for clean phone lines to enable the use of modems. For this reason, Frank designated me **GDW**'s on-line representative, and I represented **GDW** on-line through **GEnie** and **AOL**. One of my last official acts as **GDW**'s tech expert was to investigate web pages, and see what it would take to give **GDW** an on-line presence. The company closed before this could be implemented.

In 1996, I had left **GDW** and was working for a national office supply firm, selling computers and business electronics. I acquired a **Compaq 4400** after it had been returned as non-functional four times. My manager said if I could get it working, I could have it at store cost. I took the back off the console, noticed that the cable leading to the hard drive had come loose during shipment, pushed it back in place, replaced the cover, and flipped the on switch. It took off like a shot, and lasted me for several years.

My most recent computer is a **Dell**, handed down from my niece, who believed it was broken and gave it to me for Christmas. I was slightly more complex to repair, and I am currently trying to transfer my programs and files from the old to the new machine.****

I remember specifically thinking that I would probably never need all 80 megs of the 1990- vintage hard drive—this was before I learned about the memory requirements of graphics programs :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* By and large, I can't remember the details of any of these machines. If you want to know the operating system or what the RAM was, you are pretty much out of luck.

** A 5-1/4 floppy disc . . . who remembers those? Show of hands now . . . hmmmmm more than I expected.

*** Also 5-1/4 discs.

**** I have networked the machines together, the problem is in transferring the various MS programs without having all the discs (these were damaged a while back, so I can't just re-install them).

Apr 09, 2007, Strange and Unusual Communications

Over the years, **GDW** would get letters. The vast majority were orders, catalog requests, or easily solved problems. Every once in a while, however, we'd get something memorable.

Heart-Rending

Not exactly strange and unusual, but there were a couple of letters over the years that really tore at the heart-strings:

Foremost among these was the **Traveller** *Changed My Life letter* we got about 1990. This was a letter from a fan in his mid-twenties who had discovered **Traveller** about a decade earlier. He had been drifting in school, had no focus for his life, and was headed down a road to drugs and alcoholism (by his own admission). **Traveller** changed all that. One of his friends invited him over for a session, and he got hooked. Like most **Traveller** fans, he began designing worlds/starships/interstellar empires . . . and began using some of that math he had been exposed to over the years. Playing the game sparked an interest in the sciences, which resulted in an increased interest in actually learning things, which led him to college and an advanced degree in astronomy. The letter informed us that he had just been accepted into a doctoral program at the University of California (I forget which of the systems many campuses). Anyway, the letter was a two-page thank you note to the **GDW** staff for turning his life around.

Equally inspiring in their own way were the letters (we got five or six) from soldiers (also one sailor and one Marine) who wrote to thank **GDW** for our contribution of games to Iraq in **Operation Desert Storm**. Several wrote to thank us for introducing them to a new and fascinating hobby, but most just wanted to thank us for helping bored young men (we received no letters from women) pass the time while far away from home. A couple of Twilight: 2000 fans wrote to describe the games they were playing.

Funny, Strange, and Downright Odd

From time to time, we would receive letters that included artwork. Some of these were hoping that **GDW** would hire them as staff/freelance artists, but many were simply included out of sheer exuberance:

Famed artist Donna J. Barr (creator of **The Desert Peach** and other works of comic art) was one of our regular freelance artists. Every envelope we received from her was covered with sketches, sometimes having to do with what was inside, sometimes not. Eventually, I ran into her at a con, and asked why she decorated the envelopes in this fashion. She told me that she got bored standing in line at the post office, and sketched to pass the time. I wish I had saved more of them.

The **Traveller** fan we nicknamed Mr. Tail wrote regularly, and included lengthy descriptions of his campaigns, illustrated by drawings of the major characters and NPCs in his game. We called him Mr. Tail because every single character—Aslan, Vargr, Human, whatever, had a tail. His style was typical school-age ball-point pen on notebook paper, and were not intended for publication. He just wanted us to see what his characters looked like—tails and all.

The funniest letters were the ones whose authors assumed that I was female . . . Loren is one of those names that can be used for either men or women, and a small number of fans, especially **JTAS** subscribers, assumed I was female, and would address me as Miss

Wiseman or Ms. Wiseman (I am a male, for those who still have some lingering doubt). One or two offered to buy me dinner or a drinks at a convention, although I never had any of them actually follow through. The most hilarious episode of all, however, took place at a summer convention, where an irate fan stormed up to the booth, demanding to meet . . . that [deleted]*, Loren Wiseman, who screwed up my subscription! Frank Chadwick looked over at me, and I looked down at my name badge and then looked back at the fan. His face turned purple, he worked his mouth soundlessly a couple of times, and ran before I could read his name tag. To this day, I have no clue who he was.

Kind of Creepy

Many of our fans gave our female staff reason for concern, especially those who were writing from prison. Many prisoners order game catalogs, intending for their friend/relatives to send them games to help them pass the time. Some of the writers waxed eloquent about their lot, and many expressed a desire to visit the company upon their release to thank us for the excellent customer service. Some of the female staff were unwilling to sign their real names to any correspondence going to a prison, so Frank came up with the idea of creating a fake **GDW** staffer** solely for use with prisoners. The notion was if anyone came to the office asking for the non-existent clerk, we would be tipped off. No one ever asked.

The strangest letter, however, was from the gentleman who had decided that **Dark Conspiracy** was actually a means of recruiting people to fight real vampires/monsters/alien invaders, and wrote to volunteer his services.

e-mail

The strangest e-mail I ever received (from a fan, anyway) was shortly after I had signed with **SJG** to do **GURPS Traveller**, but before I had moved to Austin. The e-mail went on at great (and quite incoherent) length, begging me not to write a version for **GURPS**. As near as I could tell, the writer believed this would result in the end of civilization as we know it.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The epithet referred to a female of one of the canine species.
** I cannot remember the name we used.

Apr 23, 2007, Humor

Many years ago, there was a joke circulating about **GDW**. Basically, it went:

Mr. Interlocutor: "How many GDW employees does it take to screw in a light bulb?"
Mr. Bones: "That's not funny!"

GDW had a reputation for having no sense of humor, you see, which always struck me as odd. Practically everyone connected with **GDW** enjoyed a good joke, and the level of sophistication in our humor was very high. For some reason, however, we had become saddled with the albatross* of unfunniness. There was ample evidence to the contrary.

John Harshman produced a short-lived comic strip called **Star Lizard** for inclusion with the errata for the first edition of Triplanetary. The lead character was inspired by the artwork of Vaughn Bode (a cartoonist in the 1970s). John liked to sketch, and produced a number of cartoons and humorous drawings.

Marc's sense of humor was sophisticated—to the extent that many of us had trouble

understanding one of his jokes until we got to know his personality better. Few people know, however, that Marc submitted several cartoons to **TSR's Strategic Review Magazine** (the precursor to **Dragon**), which were published. Marc also liked to introduce subtle puns into his writing.

Frank Chadwick had a good eye for the ridiculous, and liked to write humorous responses to annoying letters **GDW** received over the years. He found writing them to be cathartic, but he never mailed them . . . they would be posted on the company bulletin board, next to the original, where they served as a source of entertainment for the staff. Also, it was Frank who thought up **GDW'**s response to the **Academy of Game Critics Awards** for **Space: 1889.**

The **Academy of Game Critics** was a group of designers and RPG industry writers** who issued tongue in cheek awards for games, and **Space: 1889** received two—worst roleplaying game and a special "if you design it, they will buy" award. The awards were announced at **Origins** in July. Frank proposed that we have gold foil stickers made announcing "*Winner: Two Academy of Game Critics Awards!*" and sticker every game book we took to **Gen-Con**. Frank made it a point to present a complimentary copy of the stickered book to each member of the Academy, and was greeted with gales of laughter. At the **Gen-Con** meeting of the Academy, the stickers were the subject of much discussion, and resulted in yet a third award for **Space: 1889**: the bronze *huevos* award for the most creative marketing campaign.

Finally, I offer this and this as examples of my ability to extract a laugh from the **JTAS** readership.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* How's that for a mixed metaphor? Kind of clumsy, but I'm working under a deadline.
** I was a member.

May 07, 2007, If

It is a pleasant diversion to speculate about what might have happened if . . .

GDWs Star Wars: An early if involves **Traveller,** and what might have happened if George Lucas had been a gamer and decided to issue an RPG license for **Star Wars** to **GDW** because he liked **Traveller.** The resultant sales would have been the shot in the arm that **GDW** needed to make the jump to a TSR-sized company, and left **Traveller** as a smaller cousin. Knowing Marc, he would have wanted to keep control of **Traveller,**, but he would have probably been deeply involved in the design of the **GDW SW** RPG, so he would have entrusted a lesser designer to take over the day-to-day work of **Traveller** and kept a supervisory control similar to his Spiritual Advisor status on the print **JTAS** masthead. Given the nature of the **GDW** staff at that time, I would probably have been given the job. I hope I would have received the occasional opportunity to work on the big game.

Dark Conspiracy and the **X-Files**: Another speculation I sometimes have is to try to imagine what would have happened if the Dark Conspiracy RPG had lasted long enough to get a sales boost from the **X-Files** TV show. The extent to which a TV show can boost game sales remains a matter of some controversy in the game business. Everyone wants to believe that a TV show would boost RPG sales, but the evidence is muddled. **GDW**s only experience with anything similar was the **Cadillacs and Dinosaurs l**icense. There was a slight boost in sales while the Saturday morning cartoon lasted, but it was too small to have any long term effect, and vanished when the cartoon went off the air.

I doubt we could have gotten an **X-Files** license, but I like to imagine that the show would have sparked interest in the game line and the associated novels might have enabled **GDW** to get a foot in the door in the world of book publishing earlier than we did. I sometimes think that the novels might have led to a movie or TV series . . . **Dark Conspiracy**'s background was well-suited to such things, and **GDW** was approached by a production company interested in doing **Dark Conspiracy** for the **Sci-Fi Channel** (sadly, nothing came of it).

G D&D W: The ultimate daydream, of course, is to imagine what might have happened had Gary Gygax pitched his notion for a role-playing game to **GDW**. Gary is known to have shown the design to **Avalon Hill**, and is rumored to have tried to interest **SPI** as well. What if he had lowered his sights a little, and driven a few hundred miles south from Lake Geneva?

I'm sure Marc would have also done **Traveller** had **GDW** published **D&D.** I like to think that **GDW** could have handled the sudden influx of wealth, one of the recurrent themes in the publishing business is how a too-rapid success can kill a publisher.

I think we could have handled it, and certainly done no worse with the game than **TSR**s managers did. My conceit is that we would have done better,* but this is not a given. My nagging suspicion is that we might easily have done worse.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I think **GDW** would have been hunting for a TV and/or movie deal a lot faster, for example.

May 21, 2007, How Come?

There are a number of "roads not traveled" in **Traveller.** We had several types of adventure that we could have published, that would have given the game greater depth, and perhaps, in the long run, attracted more players.

Espionage: The background of **Traveller** lends itself well to espionage type adventures. You have the Imperium on the one side, and numerous opponents of every size, ranging from the Zhodani to the smallest Vargr state. **GDW** went so far as to publish one espionage-type adventure: **Expedition to Zhodane**. How come the public didn't demand more? Other companies sold spy games: **Top Secret, James Bond, Mercenaries, Spies, and Private Eyes,** and so on.

Murder Mystery: We published one of these also: **Murder on Arcturus Station**. The main drawback to doing these is that the plotting must be tight if the players are not to solve things too quickly, but that merely requires more up-front preparation.

Police Procedural: The police procedural is a subset of the murder mystery, but one where the main entertainment is in how the crime is solved, not so much the solution itself. **GDW** never tried anything of this sort.

How come?

I think the reason is that we didn't perceive a demand for such things. **GDW** had plenty of writing talent at that time, both inside and outside the company. The Brothers Keith were certainly capable of anything they wanted to turn their pens to.

I think the main reason was that we (the **GDW** staff) wrote adventures primarily for the "merchant prince" audience—the group of fans that played the mercantile game. We assumed that adventures (for the most part) assumed that the adventurers were free traders and any other starting point would have turned people away. We took this approach in the

primary adventure book for the game, **The Traveller Adventure**, and never tried anything else*.

One of the things I want to try for **GURPS Traveller** through e-23 is to try espionage campaigns, either in Interstellar Wars or under the Third Imperium of the 1120s, and adventures with a diplomatic and legal basis.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Well, not seriously, anyway. Witness the one or two lone attempts at spy/mystery adventures mentioned above.

Jun 04, 2007, Yes and No

After **Traveller** had been out for a few years, it took on a kind of a life of its own. Marc had a plan for a series of games, all using the same mechanics (in this he was ahead of his time*), but for whatever reason he abandoned this notion within a year or so, and laid out a plan for the now familiar series of adventures, supplements, double adventures, and books, all in the **Official Traveller Universe**.

Since all of us at **GDW** had experience in creating both board wargames and miniatures games, there was a strong temptation to create these for the **Official Traveller Universe**—and we soon did. Part of the reason for this was, I think, that none of us had experience with what a proper RPG should consist of,** so we did what we were familiar with.

The end result was that **Traveller** became more than just a role-playing game—there were boxed adventures like **Tarsus**, there were board games like **Dark Nebula, Fifth Frontier War, and Invasion: Earth.** Marc created some simple game aid programs for the early personal computers of the day. We did large-scale combat simulations of starship combat, such as **High Guard** and even a specially-designed convention tournament—**Trillion Credit Squadron.**

Game reviewers didn't really know what to make of it all. One of them remarked that **Traveller** seemed not so much an RPG as Â"a way of life.Â" Since one could buy boardgames set in the **Traveller** universe, and combat simulations like **Mercenary** and **High Guard,** he reasoned, it wasn't really fair to call it just a role-playing game. It was even possible to Â"playÂ" the game solitaire Â– using the various rules to create worlds, star systems, sectors, and interstellar kingdom/empire/confederations. Was **Traveller** a roleplaying game? Yes. And no. Was it a series of interconnected wargames? Again, yes, but not completely. Since computer programs existed for generating worlds and the like, and it has been established that one could play **Traveller** by creating these things, was **Traveller** not also a computer game? Yes, after a fashion, but not the sort of computer game that would be considered one today.

Traveller is a fictitious universe, but it is also one of the most fully developed universes in fiction. After thirty years, I think thatÂ's one of the gameÂ's main accomplishments, and is the reason it will never die.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* It seems odd, nowadays, to think of a time when a new game required a new, designed-from-scratch rules system.

** At that time, every company was pretty much making it up as they went along. All

companies tried a wide variety of things, and discovered that petty much anything would sell to somebody.

Jun 18, 2007, Dying to Play Traveller

In life, it seems there are some things one can never live down: the cute thing you did when you were three that your older siblings never let you forget. The disaster that was your senior prom. The faintly obscene spoonerism* during the dramatic reading in English class that has not only burned itself into your memory, but is the only thing several of your classmates remember about you, [mumble] years after the event.**

In the case of **Traveller,** the game achieved legendary status as the game where you can die in character generation. Decades later, people who know nothing else about **Traveller** remember this one datum.

This came about because Marc and Frank thought it would add a certain cachet to Scout characters if their particular service was so dangerous, some of them didn't survive. It was an amusing idea, but almost immediately, Marc created a house rule that instead of dying, the Scout character was presumed to be so seriously wounded that he was retired from the service. It took a while for a version of this to be reflected in the rules, however, and the legend lives on. And on.

Another common feature of **Traveller** legend is its alleged focus on mercantile activity: the game is commonly satirized as accounting adventure in the far future or the game of interstellar trucking. While many people who play **Traveller** are interested in the details of the games economic system (to the exclusion of everything else, it often seems), this is not the only way the game can be played.

Over the years, **Traveller** has gained a reputation of being overly complex—of focusing on details to the extent that it becomes unplayable. Increasing complexity is not solely limited to **Traveller**, however—many games (including the famous letter ampersand letter) grew increasingly complex with each revision, largely (so the editor believes) in response to a perceived demand from players for such developments.

What I find most interesting, however, is the fact that certain aspects of **Traveller** have never been the subject of legend. Nobody (to my knowledge) has ever described **Traveller** as the game where you have to design the monsters.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* **Google** it; it'll be good practice.
** *Nota bene,* I'm making these up out of whole cloth . . . the things I will never live down are completely different.

Jul 02, 2007, Anniversaries 1

The year 2007 is a big year for anniversaries. It is the 30th anniversary of **Traveller,**** of course, but it is a big year for science fiction fans generally. I am no expert on the SF literary genre, so I'll just give a few of my opinions as a reader for 50+ years and a writer for nearly 40.

Star Wars: The biggest splash this year is the 30th anniversary of **Star Wars**. It's the anniversary of the release of the first movie, which is technically titled **Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope,** but it will always be just plain **Star Wars** to me. I have written of why **Star Wars** and **Traveller** will always be linked in my mind, and it should be readily apparent how

the movie influenced the game visually (through William H. Keith, and other artists, who were as inspired by the film as the rest of us).

There is, however, another reason why **Star Wars** was a watershed: the movie was the first truly successful blockbuster, big ticket, money-machine SF film, and its licensing and marketing were truly revolutionary. **Star Wars** proved there was big money to be made from a properly conceived background/milieu/genre. Not only that, the special effects technology has changed movies forever (or at least until the next revolution in SFX).

Star Trek: This year is also the 41st anniversary of **Star Trek**, (by which I mean, S**tar Trek: The Original Series** . . . like **Star Wars,** I can never think of the original series as anything other than Star Trek). The series premiered in 1996, which means that 2007 is actually the 40th anniversary of the last of the first season and the first of the second (which includes the episodes **Amok Time, City on the Edge of Forever, Mirror, Mirror,** and **I Mudd**, which I consider among the best of the series).

Star Trek was not the first television SF series, just as **Traveller** was not the first SFRPG, but (like **Traveller**) it became the standard against which others were judged. For decades, SF TV series would be compared to **Star Trek** just as SFRPGs would be compared to **Traveller f**or years.

Metropolis: Finally, 2007 is the 80th anniversary of Fritz Lang's **Metropolis** (the American release, anyway). A watershed science fiction movie, and one which is known to a majority of SF fans today (admit it, you know this movie . . . it's the one with the robot babe). **Metropolis** is also critically acclaimed, and is one of the few science fiction movies prior to 1970 to make many critics "top 100" movie lists. **Metropolis** was one of the first SF movies to have a story (not to mention being one of the first SF movies, period), not just a bunch of gee-whiz special effects strung together. **Metropolis** was also an advance in special effects, and must have been as mind blowing to the original audiences as **Star Wars** was to me.

Unfortunately, the American distributors of the film decided it was too far out for the American audience, and removed a lot of the major plot elements (and some of the more erotic moments). The film was withdrawn from circulation in Germany, and also re-cut to be shorter. Much of the film was lost, and only the discovery of some of the original film in Germany allowed a restored version to be issued (albeit still missing almost a quarter of the footage of the original premier).

I must admit to what's going to be said of the big ticket movies and TV series of 2007, when another decade or two has gone by. I'll be very interested to see for myself, and I hope I can be around for many more anniversaries to come.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, JTAS

* This editorial is a preliminary take on a talk I plan on giving at **U-Con 2007** in Ann Arbor Michigan, where I will be **GoH** this coming November. I testing parts of it out on the Gentle Readers.

** Thirty years ago this summer was when the game was first released. It seems like it was only yesterday . . . :)

Jul 16, 2007, Under-Appreciation

As I have mentioned before, I am a very poor GM. Part of this is lack of experience . . . hard as it may be for people to believe, I have refereed/game-mastered/dungeon-mastered/whatevered less than a few dozen role-playing games* in my life, and the last one was more than a decade ago, in a galaxy (or at least a state) far, far away. One thing I have come away

with, however, is how under-appreciated a GM/DM/Ref/Whosis can be by some players.

Like many GMs, I ran a game or two and then decided I wanted to create my own world.** Several continents for the adventurers to explore, dozens of nations and cultures for them to interact with. I never completed everything—not to the same level of detail, anyway—but I did get the world map laid out, the rough shape and general layout of the continents drawn up, and a very large number of maps of the chief continent (the one where the adventurers would start out) finished. I still have them stowed away in a carton somewhere in the unpainted miniatures room.***

I created a massive empire, with large cities, political intrigues, trade routes, economic patterns, all of it cribbed from the Roman Empire. The first couple of adventures saw the group leave their small barbarian village, traverse hundreds of miles of steppe, and arrive at the walled frontier of the Tigrian Empire. They took one look, pronounced it boring, and marched to the other side of the continent.

Not at all what I intended. I spent months creating the cities, mapping the capital out street by street, and sometimes building by building. I had a room by room plan of the palace of the Emperor (all of this drawn on hex/graph paper, lovingly colored in with art markers and technical pens . . . this was before the days of computer mapping. I felt betrayed that none of it would be used.

I never put that amount of effort into a campaign again—mainly because I had a day job that required the same creative talents, but in no small way because I felt the many hours of work I had put into my empire had gone unappreciated. The group abandoned **Tigria** with as little concern as they gave to wiping out a band of marauding goblins.

Traveller raised the ante, and required referees to create dozens, even hundreds of star systems. I never finished my sector for my private campaign . . . but I strongly suspect that the group I would have assembled to play in it would have decided to strike out in a direction directly away from the main worlds, seeking the large blank areas, wondering, like adventurers everywhere "What's on the next map?"

It's hard to figure out what to do when one's players treat one in this cavalier fashion. I resolved to not invest so much time in things they weren't interested in, and pay a little closer attention to the kinds of things they wanted to do rather than what I wanted to create. Fun as it is for me to map out another city, it needs to have some purpose other than keeping my drawing pen (or, these days, my cursor) busy.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I don't count tabletop miniatures games in this total.
** This was **D&D**, remember . . . a whole world was a big thing. :)
*** This is the nickname my brother gave to my spare bedroom—technically speaking it is a guestroom with a lot of books and cartons and file folders stored there, but the single largest numerical component is unpainted miniatures.

Jul 30, 2007, Ephemera

Back in the early days of the internet, just as the world wide web was getting off the ground, a correspondent described it to me as "the flavor of the month." I had been participating in on-line chatrooms for a while* (on **GENIE** and **America On Line)** and joined the **TML (Traveller Mailing List**) in 1989. It was new territory for many of us, and there was a concern that the increasing amount of material on the internet would be ephemeral, vanishing almost as soon as it was posted.

Boy, were we wrong.

One of the major "features" of the internet (although some have another word for it) is that material lasts forever.

Every e-mail, every chatroom posting, every idle comment on a forum/mailing list/blog/journal/website, might as well be carved in stone. It is almost impossible to completely correct mistakes, remove old data, or reliably update outdated material. In a way, the internet exists outside of time . . . past and present are effectively simultaneous. Nothing major has come back to haunt me . . . yet.

One of the web's greatest advantages is that it allows everyone with an opinion to express it, sometime, somewhere. It also allows debate of just about everything. On the other side of the coin, just about every deranged, crackpot, half-baked, and wrong-headed notion can find a home somewhere. You can find a dozen mutually-exclusive websites on all sides** of every major question or event—one has merely to Google for "9/11," "Elvis," "Kennedy assassination," "Iraq War" or "perfect barbecue recipe" to discover a mountain of what Ivan Stang used to call *High Weirdness.*

Try to research any topic, and you'll find that you need to be an expert in the subject to separate the erroneous material from the facts. For many years, I have been pursuing private research into the custom of carving pumpkins for Halloween decorations, but the misinformation on the subject is mountainous.*** I would have to spend a lot more time than I care to becoming an expert on the subject just to separate the wheat from the chaff.

In years past, knowledge has been lost due to flaws in the data recording technology. Millions of words printed on cheap paper have vanished as the pages crumbled to dust. Most movies made on the old celluloid film have been lost. Archives across the world have discovered that microfilm is subject to fungal attack, and even electronic media are subject to deterioration. The US Census has mountains of punch cards that can no longer be read because the machines to do so are no longer made. Every trade and craft has stories about how previous knowledge has been lost: medieval stained glass, liederkranz cheese, Stradivarius violins, ad infinitum.

I find it amusing to speculate that the Flying Spaghetti Monster will be around longer than the original print of **Metropolis**—although the robotic Maria will probably survive in the form of internet jpgs.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* In my official capacity as **GDW**'s on-line representative. **GDW**'s president, Frank Chadwick gave me the duty and I pursued it from my home computer connection, because the phone lines at **GDW'**s offices had too much electronic noise to be used for the purpose—we had to have a special line installed for our fax, and it cost us a small fortune, and Frank didn't want to go to the expense of having another line put in until we were sure it wasn't all just a flash in the pan.

** Few issues are so simple as to have only two sides, so I removed my original phrasing: " . . . on both sides . . .

*** Widely quoted is a link with the druids and human sacrifice, which has no connection with reality—most websites discussing this have copied and recopied each other that it is almost recursive . . . the internet equivalent of a Moebius strip.

Aug 13, 2007, Mongoose Traveller

The world of **Traveller** fans was shaken up last Saturday when **Mongoose Publishing**

announced it had acquired a license from Marc Miller's **Far Future Enterprises** to publish a new version of **Traveller. JTAS** contacted **Mongoose**'s Matthew Sprange and asked if he would be willing to submit to an interview to provide a few details to the fans and friends of **Traveller**. He responded immediately:

Editor: What was it about **Traveller** that made you choose it? The game has one of the most fully- realized backgrounds of any role-playing game—was this a factor in your decision?

Matthew Sprange: Funnily enough, no. **Traveller** was probably the second or third RPG I ever played, and it has always had a very special place in my thinking. We always go for licenses that we are very passionate about, and **Traveller** fits the bill beautifully. However, putting the business hat on for a moment, we also saw that it could form a great core system to many different settings, such as our **2000AD** licences, **Starship Troopers** and so on. We already had the **RuneQuest System** covering the fantasy bases, and it seemed logical to have another covering science fiction.

What better than **Traveller**?

E: When will the first release be? What is your schedule for releases, and can you tell us any specific details (such as price, titles, etc.)?

MS: The core books will begin with some familiar titles—**Mercenary, High Guard**, for example, which will expand on areas covered in the main rulebook. We have also scheduled **760 Patrons**—no, that is not a typo as some people have thought, as the hardback format allows us to cover a lot of ground. We were going to do **10,001 Characters,** but sanity prevailed . . .

Then there are the setting books. We will kick off with the **OTU**, though we have not settled on which Sector will be put front and centre first (it may not be an "obvious" one), but we will quickly add others to make **Traveller** a true multi-genre game, as we always intended. The first to appear will be **Starship Troopers,** then **Strontium Dogs** (from **2000AD**). However, each will have very close ties to the main rulebook, allowing you to use all the core rules and supplements with any setting—it will be a far tighter level of integration than between, say, **RuneQuest** and **Elric.**

E: Who have you retained to write the products and what track record do they have with RPG design in general, and with **Traveller** in particular? Have you chosen an overall line editor specifically for **Traveller**?

*M*S: Gareth Hanrahan is the lead writer on **Traveller** to begin with. He is one of our staff writers and, for my money, is one of the best in the business. He has dozens of RPG titles under his belt, including the new **Conan** RPG and **Babylon 5**. More writers will be brought into the system as time goes on (and the ground rules have been laid), under the direction of Editor/Developer Chris Longhurst, who has worked with Gareth on many books in the past, including the aforementioned **Conan 2e.**

E: What artists have you chosen to illustrate the line, and do they have any familiarity with **Traveller**'s established appearance?

MS: We have not settled on artists at this time. However, we very much want to mirror the atmosphere and feel of **Classic Traveller**, while bringing things a little more up to date.

E: The **Traveller** background spans 3,000 or more years of history, from the Interstellar Wars in 2300-2500 AD through the Expansion and Consolidation of the first 50 years of the Third Imperium, the so-called "Classic" era of **Traveller**, and the **Rebellion Era,** up to the post-Virus era of the **New Era.** Will **Mongoose Traveller** books be set in a specific era and if so what will that be? Will you cover several eras or only a single one? Will **Mongoose** publish books on alternate timelines in the **Traveller** background?

MS: We are finalising this now but, given the length of the licence, we will likely cover many different eras, though they will be introduced slowly.

E: **Traveller** fans, as I am sure you know, are fanatical about continuity with what has gone before. What steps have you and Marc Miller taken to insure that your products do not conflict with or contradict established game history?

MS: Marc is the *Master of All*, and will be keeping a close eye on everything we do.

E: Will you be producing miniatures for **Traveller**? If so, will they be pre-painted, like the **Battlefield: Evolution Figures**? Will you create miniatures for tabletop roleplaying, tabletop wargames, or both? Will you create starship miniatures, human and other aliens, and/or vehicles?

MS: There are no solid plans for this at the present, though we have discussed it, and the door is still open for the possibility.

E: What can you tell the fans about the mechanics of the rules? You have said they will be "based on **Classic Traveller**" and will be the "basic" rules to the "advanced" rules represented by Marc Miller's **T5**. Can you elaborate?

MS: The ultimate aim is to allow players to take a character, ship, planet, or whatever from our game, and immediately use it in **T5**—and vice versa. No conversions, no fiddling, just a straight match. However, the mechanics behind the various stats may be quite different between the games. We are ironing out the fundamentals at the moment, but the final game will look, feel and smell just like **Classic Traveller.**

We are also looking at the possibility of GM-less games.

E: Some past versions of **Traveller** have suffered from inadequate playtesting of the rules mechanics. Some versions were plagued with typographical errors. What steps will you take to playtest the rules? What will you do to minimize typographical errors and other mistakes?

MS: We have professional editors and many playtest teams. On top of this, however, we are considering an **Open Playtest** of the game, allowing the whole **Traveller** community to get involved. We are looking at the potential pitfalls of this, and will make an announcement soon if it goes ahead.

E: Do you have any special plans for supporting the new line? Any special plans for conventions? Any special offers for retailers?

MS: We have a very good reputation for supporting our games, from a strong release schedule to articles in our online magazine, **Signs & Portents**. Our demo teams, the **Mongoose Infantry,** will also be catering for people interested in taking a dive into the new **Traveller**.

E: How will you adapt the **Traveller** rule mechanics to non-**Traveller** game backgrounds?

MS: This will depend on the settings themselves. **Starship Troopers** is a good example though, as it is rooted in military gaming. **The Traveller** character generation system allows you to either create a bunch of greenies (go through one term, then stop), or create your very own veteran Roughnecks right from the start, by going through several terms. Players will be able to agree which of them will enter Officer School, meaning there will just be one lieutenant in the group, while the others become specialists or NCOs. We will need new career tables, of course, as well as new weapons and so forth, but all the core rules from **Traveller** will remain the same.

E: Can you give us a few more details about your plans to open-source the **Traveller** material?

MS: We are usually quite relaxed about Open Content. For **Traveller,** there will be a few restrictions, such as using the core rules (rather than inventing a completely new game and still using the **Traveller** logo!), steering clear of certain titles (you won't be able to do your own **High Guard**), and avoiding the "black cover" style of books that we will be re-adopting for our core books. The **OTU** will also be off-limits. Other than that, though, the

field is wide open. Other publishers will be free to release books as simple as new equipment or ship lists, or their own version of trading rules (say), or they can go all out and release their own settings for the game. We are going to be very interested to see what comes out. As with RuneQuest, it will all be free to use, we simply ask for a couple of copies of each book (one for us, one for Marc) as a courtesy—mostly because we are excited to see what other people are doing with the game!

E: Finally, a personal question: Have you ever played Traveller? What about the rest of the **Mongoose** staff? Was this a factor in choosing the game?

MS: Very much so. I was playing **Traveller** at school (which I think made Marc feel quite old when I told him!), and we ran a PBM version of the game for quite some time. It is a game I have constantly gone back to over the years, and I cannot wait to see the final results of our own development.

How does this new version of **Traveller** effect JTAS? We will be seeking articles to support the new version as soon as it appears in print. After all, JTAS' mission is to cover **Traveller** in all its incarnations. Personally, the editor looks forward to seeing the new **Traveller,** and thinks that it can do nothing but good for the fans and friends of the game and the game universe. How does it effect **GURPS Traveller**? Steve Jackson discusses that in the **Illuminator** for August 6, 2007.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Aug 27, 2007, Characters

There are two schools of thought on character generation in RPGs: random and player choice. Both have their partisans and both have good reasoning behind them, but they can also evoke great passion, and most of it revolves around the individual's concept of what roleplaying means. The original **Dungeons & Dragons** used the random method: roll three dice for each of six basic characteristics. I played many characters created in this way.

One of the most enjoyable for me and everyone concerned was Mongo (named after Alex Karras' role in Mel Brooks' **Blazing Saddles,** for reasons which should be obvious), a character created with Strength of 18, Constitution of 18, and Intelligence of 3. A standing joke in the first few adventures was something like "OK, we have to leave Mongo and the pack mules behind. Which of the mules should we leave in charge?" It quickly became apparent, however, that I was having trouble playing Mongo as a complete idiot, especially where tactics were concerned, and the GM (John Harshman) solved the problem by a bit of inspiration when Mongo grabbed a 2-handed sword from a wizard's lair. John decided that the sword was possessed, and diced for the battle between Mongo and the sword for mental supremacy. Mongo lost, and his body was taken over by the sword. John ruled that the character I was playing was the sword, which explained Mongo's occasional bouts of intelligence, and allowed me to continue to have fun mowing things down with a 2-hander in each hand.*

The first problem with the random generation of characters is that one never knows what one will get, and some people get characters that are not very enjoyable to play. A second (and more important, to some) problem is that it is difficult to build a group with a survivable mix of skills and abilities, "a balanced party" as some folks say. There are various rules to alleviate/eliminate the problems, but nothing completely satisfactory. Some GMs in the early days allowed people to roll up several characters and pick the best, others allowed limited re-rolling. Some people view "fixes" such as this as anathema, however—they feel you should play the character the dice give you.

The other method is to create characters by point allocation: players get a certain number of points to distribute as they see fit among various attributes and skills. I have played enjoyable characters created in this way as well, one of my favorites being Captain Combat. The Captain (I forget his real name) was my favorite **Dark Conspiracy** character—the lead in a Saturday morning live-action adventure series that was cancelled, forcing my character to seek work with his distant cousin, who happened to be a monster hunter. The Captain was a proficient hand-to-hand combat artist (he did all his own stunts) but his firearms skill was purely Hollywood—he looked good with a gun in his hand, but couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. Captain Combat is depicted on the cover of the second edition of **Twilight: 2000.**

Point allocation and other player choice systems (there are many of them . . **GURPS** uses a variation on the theme) allow people to mold characters to fit their individual taste, but many folks consider that they do not promote real roleplaying.** In real life, after all, one does not get to choose one's strength, intelligence, dexterity, etc.

My favorite systems tend toward the point allocation end of the spectrum, but I can still appreciate the challenge of playing a random character as well. In the few systems I have designed from the ground up, I tend to go with point allocation.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* A house rule was that a strength of 18 natural allowed the character to use a 2-hander with one hand, so Mongo used two at once.

** Another disadvantage is that such systems lend themselves to excessive min-maxing and munchkinism . . . although some people consider this a feature rather than a flaw.

Sep 10, 2007, Aliens, Redux

Lately, I have begun getting comments that **Traveller**'s aliens are backward, retro, and (in short) no longer believable. The basic idea expressed by these fans* is that upright, bipedal aliens are passé. A minority think that aliens with a centralized sensory cluster and an even number of limbs are so last century.

I've discussed the problems involved with designing aliens in a previous column, but the basics haven't changed: it is nearly impossible to come up with something that is truly alien, and at the same time have it be understandable to the (presumably) human GM/referee/umpire/tin-god-of-the-game (let alone the also-presumably-human players). I have discussed this matter with several famous game designers,** and they agree that it is very difficult to do believable aliens, and that it is often not worth the effort. Alien lifeforms in literature can afford to be inscrutable, at least to everyone but the author. Those in RPGs have different requirements. Aliens and especially alien societies, are usually hard for players and GMs to grok. **GDW**'s most alien aliens are among the least popular ones, with the singular exception of **Traveller**'s Hivers. **GDW**'s most popular aliens are the Aslan and the Vargr, both as anthropomorphic as an alien can get. Hivers seem to strike a chord with GMs, but not with players. The aliens in 2300 are less anthropomorphic than those of **Traveller** and they are somewhat less popular as player characters than the top two from Traveller—Aslan and Vargr. **Traveller**'s Droyne are a middle ground—humanoid but inscrutable. The remaining major non-human alien in **Traveller** are the K'kree, and their society is one of the least popular of any RPG I have ever seen. Players and GMs alike hate the K'kree with a passion I barely understand. The aliens in **Dark Conspiracy** were designed to be hated from the start. The aliens in **Space: 1889** were not designed to be inscrutable to begin with.

Aliens in the movies and television operate under other considerations as well. If the alien is not to involve costly special effects (which, I grant, are becoming less expensive as time passes), they must be able to accommodate a human actor inside (or at least an arm). Most TV aliens do not have the budget for even moderately costly SFX, and tend to be "people with things glued to their faces."

The interesting thing to me is that when I ask people for details of what they consider to be "modern" aliens, they give me descriptions of beings that would not be out of place in the Lensman universe. The desperate attempt to avoid upright bipedal aliens has caused most people to go back to the conceptualizations of aliens from the 20s and 30s (or earlier), which strikes me as odd, considering that **Traveller** is considered by these same folks to be hopelessly retro.

SF editor John Campbell insisted his writers produce aliens that (forgive me if I paraphrase) "Thought as well as humans but not exactly like humans." **GDW** designer John Harshman felt that a true alien was not possible: anything a human brain could conceive of was, by definition, not truly alien.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* In the last year there have been more than one and less then ten –- not exactly a horde :)
** Well, relatively famous, anyway.

Sep 24, 2007, Combat Systems

In RPGs, combat systems tend to grow like kudzu. Even designers who start with simple, elegant systems often cannot resist adding additional levels of detail.* During the playtest of **Twilight: 2000**, I witnessed dozens of simple, elegant rule mechanics combine into a game-strangling mass of details, slowing the game and killing much of the fun. A lot of little things can combine to become a very big thing.

Part of the problem is that combat (or at least conflict) is the core of many games. Without some kind of conflict, games are pretty dull, and combat is one of the purest forms of conflict. Designing a combat system is hard because it is difficult to decide what aspects are important and what can be dispensed with. There is a very strong temptation to add details in order to satisfy the gun nuts, the hand-to-hand nuts, and experts of all sorts. But adding details often result in players spending time considering their options, mulling things over for considerably longer than their characters would have—the end result is a five-second (or two-second or one second) turn taking two or three minutes. As Frank Chadwick once remarked, a lot can happen in five seconds, but it doesn't always happen every five seconds.**

Designers of RPG games try to draw on real events for their rules, and so RPG firefights tend to use police studies of gunfights as a basis for RPG combat. The problem here is that police shootouts tend to average a few seconds in length, and with rates of accuracy that players refuse to believe. Frank Chadwick (in an issue of the old print **Challenge Magazine**) quoted several summaries of shootouts where dozens of shots were exchanged, at point-blank range, with only one or two hits—and resulted in a storm of letters (and e-mails) from players who refused to believe him. Many of these letters quoted personal experiences at a shooting range. There were only a few letters from police officers who had actually been in shootouts, and these agreed with his conclusions almost wholeheartedly.

Similar studies of military actions show that enormous amounts of ammunition are

expended per casualty inflicted, and players find an accurate depiction of this in combat equally hard to accept. Firefights sometimes last an hour or more, and many participants spend a lot of time doing little that would show up on the gaming table. There are a lot of 5-second turns in a 30-60 minute firefight, and it is hard to reflect the timing of a real action in terms that the average player will accept as realistic.

More recent rules have tried to reflect these principles, by various means: inserting mandatory delays, action points, or other means to reflect the reality of combat. Many players find such artificial restrictions on their actions annoying, and prefer a more "heroic" approach. I have recently come to the conclusion that attempting to put a set value on the amount of time a turn takes up is not the best approach.

But, then again, what do I know?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Systems design has never been my strong suit, but I have been associated with several of the best systems designers in the business, and I watch them closely.

** He actually said "a lot can happen in 15 minutes . . . " but he was discussing turns in **Command Decision**, but the same principal holds.

Oct 08, 2007, Good Game, Bad Game

Many people think that a good RPG should be like a good book or a good movie. This notion is OK as far as it goes –– books and movies are excellent sources of background for RPGs, but it is not always easy to transfer the whole of a book/movie to the medium of roleplaying. So, what is it about the RPG medium that makes it hard to lift your favorite book/movie/TV/whatever, file off the serial numbers, and plop it into an RPG campaign?

Characters are part of the problem—or at least the number of characters often is. Books, movies, TV series, whatever, usually have a few main characters: the Steely-Jawed Hero, the Combat Monster, the Comic Relief, the Love Interest (usually aimed like a Sidewinder missile towards the Steely-Jawed Hero), etc. Good books/movies/TV/Whatever depart from the formulaic characters, but the problem with transferring most of them to an RPG is their number—there are usually not enough. RPG groups usually consist of more players than a source has main characters, forcing some members of a gaming group to take inferior/unsuitable characters.*

What makes a good game good? I have become convinced over the years that it is the background that is most important, and that the rules need to be secondary to that. One of the most interesting campaigns I participated in was a **Call of Cthulhu** campaign run by a friend who dispensed with the rules and winged most of it. Frank Chadwick was famous for running games out of his head. I don't think I ever participated in a game where the rules were played strictly according to the printed rulebook, but that may be due to my particular collection of gaming friends: we were published game designers or developers, with only one or two exceptions.

I was most interested in games that required a lot of intelligent interaction with the other players as well as with the GM (playing the role of various NPCs). I had the most fun when everyone contributed to the resolution of whatever situation the GM had presented us with, and when I managed to find a way to use my character's special talents to do my part. I can't imagine that I am too different from anyone else in these feelings.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are exceptions. The TV series Firefly and the related movie Serenity had an ensemble cast that could absorb most gaming groups without batting an eyelash.

Oct 22, 2007, Ambiance

The worst area for gaming I ever played in was when **GEN-Con** was held at the UW-Parkside Campus, and the session was held in a lecture hall . . . along with five or six others. The seats were uncomfortable, it was difficult to see all of the other players, and the noise level from the other games was distracting.* I was not impressed.

I have a few notions of what makes a good playing area:

Seating: Given the length of the average RPG session, chairs are essential, and the more comfortable the better. Some of my acquaintance hold that the chairs should not be too comfortable, or people will fall asleep, however, but I consider this a feature rather than a bug. Recliners are less suitable for RPGing, since I consider the seated around a table mode of play to be the best, which brings me to the next feature:

The Table: Players and GM all have extensive record-keeping requirements, and the GM needs to refer to one or more rulebooks from time to time. Players need a surface to roll dice where the GM can see them (although like God, the GM rolls the dice where the players can't see them). If a map and/or miniatures are being used, a large flat surface is required. In addition, everyone needs a place to park their drinks and snacks.

Food/Snacks: The traditional food is pizza, but health conscious gamers often go with something else. Many groups dispense with food, and some forbid it, but most people need some sort of fluid during a game . . . people do a lot of talking, and need their whistles wetted from time to time.

Good Lighting: As the years go by, and my eyes succumb to Presbyopia (if you don't know what that is, look it up . . . it'll give you something to look forward to), I find good lighting is increasingly essential.

Music: Lastly, many groups like to have mood-setting music in the background. My on preferences are to dispense with it (except for certain special instances), since it can interfere with the conversational segment of the game, but many of todays gamers seem incapable of being anywhere without music.

Many gamers have the luxury of a permanent set-up for their gaming, but most of us have to make do with a living room or rec room that gets used for many other purposes. Until we can play games by plugging directly into the brain, the devoted game room will have to do as the ultimate gaming experience.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* It was also the first RPG session where I intentionally killed another players character (I had done it before, but not intentionally . . . which is another story). One of the party was a thief and spent the first few minutes picking everyone elses pockets. When he got round to me, the DM rolled dice and determined that my character (a warrior) had caught him at it. The warrior drew down and decapitated the thief, which got things off to a rollicking start (I looted the body and returned everything that had been taken to the rightful owners . . . to the astonishment of the other players and the DM. The best area for miniatures I ever

saw was in a hobby shop in a Chicago suburb—the owner had set up an entire floor with large tables for tabletop lead-pushing, carpeting, soundproofed ceiling tile, and vending machines for soda and snacks. I understand it went out of business a few years ago ... pity.

Nov 05, 2007, Conventions 2007

For those of you within one parsec of Michigan this weekend, I'll be celebrating the 30th anniversary of **Traveller** at **U-Con**, November 9-11 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I'm the convention's guest of honor, and although I've never been to Ann Arbor before, expect to have a great time.

I've been a guest at numerous conventions over the years, and it's always a thrill to be invited. The greatest distance I've traveled was to Sundsvall, Sweden* (during the flight there I flew over Iceland and Norway also). I've been a guest at conventions in Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia as well, sometimes several times.

The greatest thing about being a guest of honor is that you get to hang out with famous people in the green room. The green room, for those of you who don't know, isn't green, although it is a room. "Green room" is the term used for the guest hospitality room, where you get to kick back, nosh down on some munchies, and grab a catnap between your scheduled appearances. You also get to sneak a peek at things that "happen to be lying around" like the "bible" for an upcoming SF television series (I won't say more—other than to say it was over a decade ago).

In return for being a guest, you are required to earn your keep by giving talks, serving on panels, attending ceremonial dinners, judging contests, signing autographs, and generally helping promote the convention. For a relatively minor celebrity such as myself, these tasks can be quite a thrill (I'm told some people eventually come to resent all the attention). I've always enjoyed meeting the fans of the various games I've worked on, and I expect to continue the custom in Michigan.

The con committee often has a few things planned out to get you away from the convention itself. When I was a guest at **Sci-Con** in Norfolk, Virginia, the other guests (writer Janny Wurtz and artist Don Maitz) were treated to a tour of a maritime museum, which was a great treat for all of us.

The greatest thing, however, is talking to the fans—the people who have been buying the things I write for years. It is always of great value to talk to the audience you are aiming at, and I look forward to another episode in a few days. I hope to see you there!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Which also added several entries to my repertoire of amusing anecdotes.

Nov 19, 2007, Time and Traveller

I've loved time travel stories ever since I read Mark Twain's **A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court** (although I didn't like the ending much). I liked L. Sprague DeCamp's **Lest Darkness Fall** much better. I was not the only member of the **GDW** design staff with this interest, so it seems odd that we never included time travel scenarios in **Traveller.**

Marc's original plan for **Traveller** was that it would be the first of a series of RPGs set in various periods of history, roughly linked to tech level. The notion of a time travel game seems an obvious extension, but reality intervened. **GDW** discovered that supplements for **Traveller** sold very well, and that the customers (in letters and in person at conventions)

wanted an official background, including a lengthy (and increasingly detailed) history. The development of the background gave us second thoughts about official time travel in T**raveller.**

We hesitated because we felt (with some justification) that time travel adventures would necessitate changes to the background history and that the fans were becoming attached to the **Third Imperium** and would complain if changes were suddenly made. We were unsure how to handle the whole question of how to handle the multiple paradoxes created by time travel (assuming you follow the notion that time travel paradoxes are inevitable . . . that's a question for another time). For some reason, we felt the notion of creating several parallel universes would be seen by our fans as an attempt to vacuum extra money out of them . . . this was the usual complaint whenever we mentioned the idea in print or at conventions.

With the change to the background implemented in **MegaTraveller**, there were an increasing number of fans who wrote that they were implementing time travel adventures as a means of preventing the **Rebellion Era.** A popular scenario was to prevent the assassination of Strephon by party from the future. Another was for a party to skip the intervening bad times by jumping across the decades.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Dec 03, 2007, Questions & Answers

During the recent **U-Con Convention** at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I participated in several Q & A sessions about **Traveller** in particular and **GDW** in general. Some of you have no doubt seen these before—but it seems to me that the fact that they recur repeatedly over the years indicates that there remain fans who are still curious.

One of the most common is: Where did **Traveller** come from? **Traveller** originated in the fertile mind of Marc W. Miller and was designed primarily by him and Frank Chadwick (although all of us at **GDW** contributed). The **GDW** staff had been introduced to RPGs in 1974* and produced our own in 1975 (**En Garde!**). All of us were widely read, and SF was a favorite with all of us. Marc took inspiration from the **Dumarest Series** of author E.C. Tubb, and the works of Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Poul Anderson, and Andre Norton, to name a few. The original notion was to produce a series of RPGs, but **GDW** soon focused our efforts on **Traveller**—we discovered an interesting phenomenon in the sales pattern: Each product had high initial sales that quickly fell off, but eventually stabilized into a typical long tail sakes pattern. However, each additional supplementary book boosted sales of the original game slightly . . . the tail of the basic game sales eventually stabilized, but at a slightly higher level than before.

Why did so many of the early adventures involve criminals? Mostly, because thats how we thought RPGs were supposed to be played—for certain values of the word criminal. When we played **D&D**, we played mostly kill the monsters and take their stuff scenarios, graduating to more complex situations that usually involved break into someplace and rescue someone/something from the clutches of the villain. Our **Traveller** playtest adventures tended to be mercenary actions, (drawing inspiration from **Pournelle's Falkenberg Series** and Drake's **Hammers Slammers Books**), mercantile operations (based primarily on Andre Norton and Poul Anderson's **Nicholas van Rijn Books**), and espionage and caper adventures, drawing on Harry Harrison's **Stainless Steel Rat Novels. Smugglers** and other criminal sorts worked their way in because people wanted to be Han Solo (and, later, Mal Reynolds). We didn't actually intend for the players to turn pirate . . . that's just the

way many of them went. Its not like we didn't have plenty of literary precedent: characters like Robin Hood, Jesse James, and Raffles are common fictional templates, and all of them criminals of one sort or another.

Why are computers so big? The space devoted to computers in the design sequence includes the chair the operator sits in, the supporting hard copies of the documentation, and a dozen other little things that go with a computer workstation on a starship. People focus on the One ton per computer part and don't look at the rest. Of course, the part about only running one or two programs at once was unrealistic, even for the late 1970s.

Why guns and no more sci fi weapons such as lasers, blasters, eludium q-3 atomic space modulators, and so on? I chalk this up to the fact that Marc and the rest of us were gun nuts, and found chemical slug throwers more interesting. We gave you the FGMPs later.

Why does jump take a week? We picked a number that seemed to work in the playtests. If Marc had chosen five days, people would be asking Why does jump take five days? It gave us the feel we wanted, and for no other reason.

Why no communication faster than starships can travel? We wanted to try something different, and a situation where the man/woman/alien on the spot was responsible for their own decisions, and could act without being second guessed by someone on the FTL radio.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* In the form of the so called brown-box **D&D,** by a friend from the **University of Illinois Games Club**. Thanks Tony!

Dec 17, 2007, Why?

I occasionally wonder why it is that some types of adventure/campaign are more popular with **Traveller** players and GMs than others. Mercenary campaigns and mercantile campaigns are pretty much tied for first place, and the reasons for that are fairly simple. Some of the first **Traveller** adventures were military in nature, and the **The Traveller Adventure Set** the standard for the traveling trader style of adventures.

More of a mystery to me is why some of the other adventures didn't take off as well as the above. **GDW** never published any law enforcement adventures (at least none where the adventurers were expected to be members of an official LE group). We did publish a couple of murder mystery adventures, and it puzzled me why those didn't seem to sell as well as other adventure types. Then I tried to write one, and discovered that they are not as easy as they look . . . the GM needs to think through a crime, create trails of evidence for the investigators, create a few false leads and the like, and make the whole thing hang together. Its easy to put something together, but a lot harder to do something good. A problem with adventurers working for the government is that most RPG groups tend to play rather fast and loose with authority, and it is hard to imagine them lasting long in any but the most independent of troubleshooting groups.

Another adventure type that comes to my mind occasionally involves a traveling rock band (or other musical group). This was originally explored by John M. Ford in an article **Roadshow** (in the print **JTAS**)—the article suggested the adventurers be hired as roadies or security for the band, and suggested a number of scenarios. This is a popular campaign to plan and discuss, but doesn't seem to be as popular when it comes to actually putting one on: I've only had a few people tell me they actually succeeded in running one.

Political and diplomatic campaigns share some of the problems of the law enforcement campaign—most adventurers dislike being supervised too closely. Spy campaigns also

require a subtle hand by the GM if they are not to constantly deteriorate into gunfights. **GDW** never published a politico-diplomatic campaign, although **Expedition to Zhodane** had elements of espionage.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Dec 31, 2007, What is . . . ?

With almost clockwork regularity, on-line **Traveller** discussions break out into debates. Piracy. Big ship vs small ship Imperium. There are several that pop up regularly, and most of them are not really resolvable . . . hence the regularity with which they recur.

One of these "recurring discussions" is "What is **Traveller**? " usually the question is phrased something like "Is **Traveller** the rules set or the background?" Are people who do not use an official **Traveller** rules set* or an **Official Traveller Universe**** really playing **Traveller**? If not, why not, and if so, why so?

Traveller fans are not alone: I follow other on-line discussions on a site devoted to miniature wargaming and associated topics, and numerous similar questions pop up with great regularity as well. Each of these show areas of similarity.

There are subsets of miniatures wargaming (duh!): devotees of a particular historical era have it relatively easy—historians have mostly managed to agree when the Napoleonic Wars started and ended, and the general geographic area covered. Ditto for other wars, within reason (Frank Chadwick considered WWII to have really begun on June 22 1941 . . . the date of the German invasion of the USSR, which he considered to be the main theater. Historians of other nationalities differ with this notion . . . 1941, 1939, 1935, 1932 . . . all have their advocates). Devotees of other genres of lead pushing are on less firm ground. *What is VSF (Victorian Science Fiction) gaming?* Is it the period covered by the standard definition of "Victorian" (the reign of Queen Victoria) or can it be extended by a few of decades on either side? Are SF features necessary, or can a simple alternate Victorian history (where Gordon was not killed at Khartoum, for example) be considered **VSF**?

What is Pulp gaming? Does it draw its influence from the pulp magazines of the 20th century (and thus limited chronologically) or is it gaming that takes a particular (almost RPG) approach to the subject? Is pulp a time period or an approach? Both? Neither?

One of my earliest editorials for the print version of **JTAS** commented on the many letters I had received asking when **JTAS** was going to "stop fooling around and concentrate on the real **Traveller**?"—the interesting point being that no two letters agreed what that was.

It is very hard to strictly define **Traveller**—and it has been since about 1979, when the game began to break out of the confines of what had come before. Is **Traveller** a rules set? A background? An approach to SF gaming? All/none of the above? Your humble editor takes the view that **Traveller** is what **Traveller** players say they are playing. A tautology, I know . . . but what use is there in arguing when you could be enjoying the game?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* "What is the **Official Traveller Rules Set?**" is another subject of periodic discussion, and I will not deal with it here.
** See above, substituting "Rules Set" for "Universe."

2008

2008

Jan 14, 2008, Animals, Plus

Those of you looking for the January 8th issue of **JTAS** are doomed to find nothing. **JTAS** is bi- weekly, but it seems that the script which keeps track of when to upload **JTAS** decided that January 1st 2008 and January 8th 2008 were two weeks apart, and uploaded the article queue . . . which was, of course, empty, since I usually fill it the weekend immediately before its due. Further investigation revealed that the arcane formula by which the program determined what bi-weekly meant exactly broke badly when confronted with a year that begins on a Tuesday (as 2008 did, in case you didn't notice). **SJG**s IT department eliminated the bogus issue, reposted the real one, and then confronted the issue of how to revise the script to keep this from happening again . . . without creating some other unforeseeable glitch.*

Marc Miller used to say that one of the great things about working with **Traveller** is that it made him one of the few people in the world who designed starships for a living. The same thing could be said for creating non-terrestrial animals. It is a blast, as I discovered long ago (**JTAS** author Eric Funk seems to have caught the same bug also).

Dougal Dixon is especially prolific, having produced **After Man,** and **The Future is Wild**, among others. Terence-Dickinson's **Extraterrestrials: A Field Guide for Earthlings,** covers intelligent beings as well, but is also a good source of inspiration. Trolling Amazon-dot-com through these links will uncover many more.

Author/writer William H. Keith and I loved to create animals. Bill lived in suburban Chicago, about three hours drive from **GDW**s HQ in Normal, Illinois, so every few weeks he and his brother Andrew would drive down and we would spend the day brainstorming Bestiary articles for **JTAS** and animals for inclusion in other books. Bill and I had both been biology minors in college, and we both had a keen interest in evolutionary biology and comparative anatomy. We were also both dinosaur freaks, which seems to go hand in hand with creating animals for a living. A good grounding in paleontology (both vertebrate and invertebrate) is very useful to the creation of realistic critters.

The definition of realistic critters has changed in the popular mind in the last few years . . . I occasionally hear remarks that the **Traveller** animals are trite (some have said old fashioned) because they are mostly bilaterally symmetrical. The problem is that we just do not know what shape extraterrestrial life will take. I hold to the belief that Earth-like environments will tend to produce Earth-like animals (and no one who is familiar with the breadth of form and appearance that life takes/has taken on Earth will call that trite). There is no real way to settle the argument aside from going there and picking up a few specimens, which, sadly, is not likely to happen soon.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Doncha just love programming?

Jan 28, 2008, A Few Things . . . 1

This issue, Id like to discuss a few things that have always annoyed me, at least a little. Although my examples are from gaming, and some related to **Traveller**, these things are pretty common in all the creative fields. Some of these are really intellectual short circuits, which some might call fallacies, but they are as often as not unconscious, and I freely admit that I have engaged in them myself.

The first is the notion that just because two things are similar, one was inspired by (or stolen from) the other. There are many **Traveller**-related versions of this notion: The Aslan were inspired by C. J. Cherrryh's Chanur, the Ancients were stolen from Frederik Pohl's **Hee-Chee,*** **Babylon 5** and **Firefly** were inspired by **Traveller**, and so on. What annoys me about these things is when people make statements like X was taken from Y without offering any evidence, as if it were intuitively obvious. As evidence against this sort of thing, I offer a story I first ran into in a book called **Writing the Script,** by Wells Root. Many years ago, Mr. Root was contacted by a writer who had a new idea for a TV series, based on original historical research: it concerned a law enforcement body in the 1800s known as the Arizona Rangers, who were less famous than their Texas counterparts. The writer had dug out old newspaper articles, read dozens of books, and uncovered numerous fascinating tales of derring-do. Mr. Root was forced to tell the author that the same basic idea had been filed with the **Writers Guild of America** archives several times. Peoples minds operate much the same, and often view similar premises in similar ways. Many years ago (while a senior in high school), I wrote a novel about a man and a mermaid, which was similar in some ways to a movie called **Splash**. I was angered, wondering how someone had managed to steal my ideas, until I reflected on the two combined plots, and observed that while they shared some similar elements (nerd meets mermaid, hilarity ensues), they were not really that much alike. Its rather like accusing someone of intellectual theft on the basis that the two works in question are set in Texas, and involve horses and oil.

A second thing that I have always found annoying is people who claim insider knowledge of companies I have worked for. This was very common 13+ years ago, during and after the time when **GDW** was on its last legs. People would post some outrageous rumor based on inside sources. I was angered by this because the rumor was false or blown completely out of proportion, and the only conceivable source would have been three or four people . . . all of whom I had been on a first name basis with for more than 20 years. I have mellowed considerably since that time, but I still refuse to countenance any rumor that doesn't have a name attached.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This was actually reported to Mr. Pohl's agent by someone who didnt like **GDW** very much . . . **GDW** sent copies of everything mentioning the Ancients, and the agent, after reading them, called us (laughing) to tell us he didn't find anything actionable and spoke at length over the problem of toxic fans.

Feb 11, 2008, The Big (and Small) Picture

I've had a passion for maps since I was very young. One of my earliest misbehaviors (I think I was 3 or 4 years old) was when I tore the atlas pages from the back of the family encyclopedia intending to join them together.* Throughout school I drew maps of fictional countries, cities, and cross sections of submarines and spacecraft (I didn't get into floorplans of such things until high school). I adored geography class, and bought atlases and maps with my hard earned paper-route money (only history books had higher priority . . . and if there was something that had Historical Atlas of in the title, I was a guaranteed customer).

It goes without saying that one thing that attracted me to **D&D** was the mapping involved. I drew worlds, continents, nations, cities, and individual buildings, as well as dungeons, castles, and so on. During 1973 and 1974, I was accused of buying graph paper and colored pencils in place of food . . . which was not completely true (although I still have a

file drawer worth of my efforts).

Naturally, I was a sucker for drawing programs, especially those that held promise of really good looking maps and floorplans. My first successful attempts at starship deckplans came with my discovery of **Drawing Table** in the 1980s. **Twilight: 2000** and **Merc: 2000** fans saw some of the results in the floorplans included with the supplements for these two game lines. Right now I'm using an older version of **Campaign Cartographer**, which (like most such programs) is vastly better than my meager talents can take advantage of.

When I first bought the program, I spent an entire weekend creating a continent, linked an area on that map to a national map, linked a city on that map to a street map, and so on down through city blocks, a house, and culminated in a section of the roof of one building that showed the hinges to the trap door at twice life size. I showed this off to a couple of friends, and they were . . . frightfully bored. One muttered something about and not a sparrow falls,** while rolling his eyes skyward.

Aside from doing a sector map for my **Traveller** campaigns (one each) I had little interest in mapping anything larger than a world. I don't think I ever used any of the drawing/mapping programs I've accumulated over the years to diagram a solar system (although I have been tempted).

I have dozens of books on buildings and architecture, and numerous books on cities, focusing on the ancient world. I have created several cities (maps of cities, more properly) and one of my unpublished RPG books is devoted to transferring the historical Near Eastern city of Ascalon to a fantasy world. Oddly enough, I have never had the slightest interest in architecture as a profession (although I did flirt briefly with the notion of becoming an architectural modeler—but thats another story).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My mother caught me, and managed to prevent me from completing my plan. I received her "You are a grave disappointment to me." look, a scolding, and a suggestion that the two of us could repair the damage with transparent tape.

** A reference to the **Bible** . . . interested parties can look it up on their own time.

Feb 25, 2008, In the Beginning

The Time: Early 1977.*

The Place: **Game Designers Workshops** weekly creative meeting.

The meeting is run informally, there are no minutes, and no rules of order, but there is an audiotape. Each designer reports on the progress of his projects, and then the time comes for suggestions for the future. Marc Miller's turn comes around:

Marc: "I'll be back in a minute. " Marc leaves and returns a few minutes later with a filing cabinet on a dolly.

Frank Chadwick: "How many projects do you have?"

MM: "Just one"

FC: "One? Why the filing cabinet? "

MM: "Thats the whole project. Its a role-playing game I call **Traveller.**"

Loren Wiseman: "That's the science fiction game you were telling me about?"

MM: "Yeah."

LW: "Why does it need a whole filing cabinet?"

MM: "Its pretty detailed . . . "

Rich Banner; "How big are we talking?"

MM: "I figure 16 books . . . about 500 pages each.

FC: (stunned) What!

MM: "It'd be a boxed set. Or we could sell them individually. Not everybody'll need the character generation books immediately."

RB: (equally stunned) Sixteen books!

MM: "Like I said, it's pretty detailed . . . "

RB: Wed need to charge four or five hundred bucks for something like that!

LW: We can't possibly sell something that big.

FC: What on Earth takes up that much room?

MM: Well, I need five volumes for the stellar generation sequence. You start with a cloud of stellar dust and run it through several million years of stellar evolution that gives you the orbits of all the worlds and moons and planetoid belts. And cometary bodies, of course.

LW: Why do you need . . . ?

MM: So you can work out orbits and stuff. How else are you going to be able to create the tide tables, and figure out the length of the local year and the local day.

FC: uh . . .

MM: then you can work out the habitable zones and figure out which worlds have life sustaining atmospheres.

John Harshman: Theres a big difference between a primordial atmosphere and a . . .

MM: Yeah, I got that in Volume VII. Evolution of life and the effect on the world as a whole . . .

RB: You've got to cut this down a bit. We can't sell a $500 RPG product.

MM: But people want details. They need to know the mineral constituents of the worlds crust down to several miles depth. They need to know the orbits of everything in the system over a kilometer in diameter. How are we going to advertise this game as realistic if it doesn't have everything in it?

JH: Do you have a system for the evolution of life?

(Marc rummages in the cabinet and hands John a thick bundle of typewritten pages.)

MM: That's Volume XI.

LW: What about character generation?

MM: Volumes I through III.

LW: Do you have careers?

MM: Just over seven hundred.

LW: Can I be a . . . a shoe salesman?

(Marc looks crestfallen. Uh . . . He begins thumbing through the three character generation volumes.) I haven't had time to make an index yet. *(More flipping.)* Give me a minute.

FC: While Marc is looking, Id like to bring up a project we have discussed several times . . .

LW: Not that vampire thing again.

FC: I've revised it completely . . .*

At this point the tape breaks, and the rest of the meeting is lost.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* With tongue firmly in cheek.

Mar 10, 2008, E. Gary Gygax 1938-2008

I wanted to remember an industry pioneer and a friend.

Gary Gygax, co-creator of **D&D**, died one week ago today. I first corresponded with Gary in the late 1960s, when he was a frequent contributor to assorted gaming magazines, most notably the letters column of the **Avalon Hill General.** I first met him in person at a small convention in Chicago shortly after the publication of something he called a <u>role playing game.</u> He sold me my first copy of the game,* chatted about boardgames, and eventually admitted he did not remember my letters (no surprise . . . they were mostly attacks on his comments regarding *Afrika Korps* and were pretty idiotic I was in my perfect plan stage back then). I've talked about Gary's contributions to the hobby at large elsewhere, and others have done so much better than I could possibly do, so I'll leave the eulogies to them. However, without **D&D,** I have no doubt there would have never been a **Traveller**. Historians argue the great man theory of history endlessly, but I am sure that Marc Miller and **GDW** would never have ventured into RPGs had Gary and Dave not written **D&D.** Furthermore, I sincerely doubt that **GDW** would have been nearly as profitable for nearly as long without RPGs. I am a better person for having known and worked with Gary, and happier for my career in RPGs than I would have been in my alternative career—teaching high school history.

Mar 10, 2008, In-Jokes

Few people can resist putting in jokes in their writings, and the creative team of **Traveller** is no exception. The challenge is to introduce something unique and obscure, but not so esoteric that no one else in the world will recognize it. I've revealed a few of the more common ones previously, but here are a few of the less well-known ones:

Zyra/Trins Veil in the **Spinward Marches** is a tribute to the body of the same name in Wylie's **When Worlds Collide**.

Rapp's World/Querion honors gamer and **Traveller** fan Don Rapp (who operated **Paranoia Press** and produced several products under license).

Pyramus and Thysbe (both Trins Veil subsector) are from the play within the play in Shakespeare's **A Midsummer Nights Dream** and are included because they are easily recognizable to anyone who actually paid attention in English Lit.

Remulak/Gemini in the **Solomani Rim** is a tribute to the **Coneheads** sketches from **NBCs Saturday Night Live!** s early years.

Cipangu and Nerewhon (both in Cronor subsector of the SM) are fairly obvious classical illusions that some readers may not be aware of . . . the former an archaic name for Japan, the latter is left up to the readers Google-fu.

Lastly, a bit of a stretch from the **Twilight: 2000**s **Last Submarine Series**—when writing the final book in the trilogy, I needed a name for a Typhoon-class Soviet submarine, and (at the suggestion of Frank Chadwick) chose the name *Barrikadi.* This was a tribute to the book and movie **Hunt for Red October** which Frank and I both enjoyed. Fans of both will recall that Red October is a (converted) Typhoon, and students of the East Front of WWII will recognize *Barrikadi* (barricades) as one of the factory complexes at Stalingrad ... another being *Krasny Oktobyr*—**Red October**.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For the purists out there, it was the wood grain box edition. I still have it, although it is heavily annotated and pretty much shot. I did not have the foresight to ask for his autograph.

Mar 24, 2008, Things That I'm Curious About

There area number of aspects of modern American culture that interest me, and I wonder to the extent some of these are light and ephemeral, and to what extent they are timeless (i.e., the extent to which they can be counted upon to appear in **Traveller**).

First is the so-called back in school anxiety dream. This is the one where you, as an adult dream that you are back in high school, usually to take a test that will determine whether you pass some vitally important class that determines when you graduate. I've had this dream, uncounted thousands of Americans have had this dream, and no small number of non-Americans have had it also. My version usually finds me strolling down a school hall (sometimes recognizable as that of my HS, sometimes not) and wondering what I'm doing there . . . since I know I graduated years ago. I enter a classroom and notice that the teacher has written FINAL EXAM on the blackboard, and under that is the name of the class . . . usually something like Cultural Anthropology or French that my school did not offer. Details vary with the individual.

Basically, it indicates that you are currently facing some upcoming challenge, and this is the way your subconscious expresses the anxiety and nervousness. Presumably, this dream has been around for as long as there have been important tests in high school. Public schools have been a common feature of American society since the late 19th Century, but achieved their present features (standardized tests) in the 1950s.

Anxiety dreams of various sorts are vastly older than that . . . the oldest I know of is in the letters of a Roman public official, who recounts dreaming that he is called before the emperor and ordered to deliver a report of his governorship of a province . . . one he has never even been to, let alone governed. I think we may safely assume that these kinds of dreams are safe to include as part of the Far Future.

Another thing I am curious about is precisely when school became such a major rite of passage in American culture. Being popular, a member of the in clique, and being passionately concerned with such aspects of the pecking order as who sits next to who during lunch are such an ingrained part of growing up for American teens that the psychological and social pressures can lead to suicide or murder. The subject is vastly more complex than I can go into here, but again, this is a relatively recent phenomenon.* In recent decades, the childhood years have been extended by almost a decade—a boy became a man as early as 11 or 12 instead of the present 17-19 years. In farming societies, labor was needed in the fields as soon as the child was physically able. The notion of a teenager without a job would have puzzled most people prior to the late 19th Century.

In the present, marriage is discouraged until the early 20s in most places in America (details vary), and adolescents are encouraged to delay other adult responsibilities, which has left the social vacuum that is American high school. One wonders how long this will continue, especially as life spans are extended. When the average lifespan at birth was 40, taking nearly a third of that time merely to start a family would have been absurd. When the average lifespan is 120 plus . . . who knows? In the future, will childhood last into the 30s?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Provided you consider post-WWII to be relatively recent ... some people don't :)

Apr 07, 2008, "I Don't Think We're in Kansas Anymore . . ."

Dorothy's famous line upon arriving in Oz (delivered to her dog, Toto), is a bit of an understatement: the film **The Wizard of Oz** has just changed from black-and-white to full color* (an innovation at the time) and the landscape is a bit surreal. The point of the color change was to emphasize that Dorothy (and the audience) were no longer in a familiar setting, no longer someplace where they could count on predicting the actions of those around them. GMs often run into the problem of how to get this across to the players in manner that gets the point across but isn't especially time consuming. Having to describe the whole culture can be too time consuming, and few people want to read a 1,200 page campaign background.

One way to achieve the "*Not in Kansas*" feeling is to focus on a couple of everyday things that this place does differently. I once saw a house where the doorknobs were placed in the middle of the doors (sadly, I don't remember the details—I was a child at the time) and it always seemed to me that was a quick way of indicating something was different about a place. Here are a few others:

All doors are "Dutch" doors, i.e., divided into top and bottom halves. Usually, either the top is opened or both halves are opened . . . opening the bottom half occurs only in **Three Stooges** shorts. All meals are eaten standing. Dining tables, etc., are at a height convenient for standing diners, not seated ones. No one drinks any liquid directly from a cup or glass . . . they always use a straw. Perhaps this straw incorporates a simple filter to strain out foreign matter, or to prevent the accidental consumption of insects (as is done in some places in India). Using a fork and a knife to cut food is considered a social faux pas along the lines of wiping one's lips on the tablecloth. Food is always served precut into bite-sized chunks, and knives are used in the kitchen only. An additional bit of fluff can be added by saying that this custom began because a famous person forbade knives out of a fear of assassination.

Seven (or three, or 29, or two nines in a row) is considered an unlucky number.

[Pick your favorite animal companion species] are considered unclean, and viewed with the same revulsion as cockroaches.

Shoes must never be colored black.

The reasoning behind these little variances can be religious, social, age-old superstition, or simply "that's the way we've always done things."

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* A classic joke when colorization of movies began was to start a rumor that the first part of the movie was going to be colorized.

Apr 21, 2008, How Long Will People Stay People?

How long will people stay people? One of the assumptions of **Traveller** is that humanity of the future will be recognizably human. In designing the game, we (at **GDW**) assumed that people will have pretty much the same motivations that they do now, and players from the present day will be able to react, emote, adventure, and scheme in the game much as they do today . . . except that there would be a few differences in their surroundings.*

There are arguments for and against this proposition, and I do not intend to debate the issue here, except to defend the position we took in designing **Traveller**. There are many

good games that take a different approach (not the least of which is **SJG**'s own **GURPS Transhuman Space Series**), but they are not **Traveller** in the opinion of the original designers and a large number of the game's players.

Why do I believe that people won't change too much in several thousand years? For one thing, there are entire tribes in New Guinea** whose people have made the jump from a Stone Age culture to the 20th century in less than a generation. Cell phones have shown up in use with goatherds who have nothing else that wasn't around in 1500 B.C. – there are photos on the Internet to demonstrate this. My readings of history have convinced me that there is a core of behavior and reactions that we share with people thousands of years in the past. I offer a few simple examples (I'm sure the readers can come up with others):

• A Greek writing in the 4th Century BC (a gentleman known only as Aineias the Tactician) gives a piece of advice to those defending a city against a siege: "When the people of Sinope found themselves dangerously short of men [. . .] they disguised and equipped the most physically suitable of their women [. . .] promenading them on the side of the wall where they were in the fullest view of the enemy. They were not allowed to throw anything, however: a woman is recognizable a long way off by the way she throws . . . "I believe this is the earliest example of the sentiment "you throw like a girl!" which was a common remark in the days of my youth.

• Several papyrus documents from Roman Egypt (many of them quoted in **Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule**), dating more than 2000 years in the past, indicate that legal contracts and bureaucracies haven't changed much in the intervening years.

• My personal favorite (and I long ago lost the precise reference, but it was from a collection of papyruses describing Hellenistic and Roman culture) is a pay record of a Roman soldier in the 3rd Century AD that bears a remarkable resemblance to a modern military personnel file (as several former soldiers have attested)—down to the note at the bottom "Copy 3 of 5!"

I have nothing against people who wish to explore transhumanisn in their games . . . but they will not find it easy to do in **Traveller**—the game just isn't intended for that.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**
* Like, for example, interstellar space travel, non-human aliens, and one or two other things.
** And elsewhere.

May 05, 2008, Then and Now 1

Then: **GDW,** ca. 1973-1994
Now: **Illuminati World HQ**, ca.2007+.

Writing Implements

Then: My preferred pen was the **Black Flair™** (by **Papermate**, if I recall correctly). I had several mechanical pen & pencil sets given to me as Christmas/birthday presents. I tended to use pencils at the office and pens at home (mainly because the pen came with a handy clip to fasten it to the neck of a t-shirt or the color of a polo shirt). These were applied to canary legal pads, which **GDW** bought in ton lots, as both Frank and Marc preferred them for their first drafts. I preferred letter-sized, but I had to order those special, and it was usually easier to use the legal size. I scribbled notes on these during meetings, wrote first drafts of games or articles on them, and generally filled hundreds of them with my clear but illegible* handwriting.

My first mechanical writing aid was a portable typewriter, purchased by my parents as a high school graduation gift. This was a manual, which I replaced with an electric as soon as my disposable income from **GDW** permitted I wore out two typewriters working for **GDW**, before they were replaced by computers.

Now: I abandoned **Flairs** for generic gel pens years ago, but I still use canary pads (5" x 8" pocket-sized ones these days) for notes and jotting down inspirations at odd hours. I use few pencils these days, and I'm not sure where my sharpener is right now . . . it is so much easier to carry pens (still clipped to the collar of a polo or t-shirt I own a few shirts with pockets, but I haven't had a pocket protector in more than three decades . . . I guess my geek cred is a little lacking).

Computer(s)

Then: My first computer (private purchase) was an **Atari 800**, followed by a **1040 ST,** and then a series of PC compatibles. The first computer at the **GDW** offices . . . is a toss-up between Rich Banners **Corona** luggable (calling it a portable was a misnomer) or the **TRS-80** the office Marc and Frank bought as a learning tool. Rich and Marc were interested in programming, my humble self less so, and Frank not at all. The office later converted to **Apple II**s, then PC compatibles, with the occasional **Macintosh**. I bought a series of dot matrix printers, then converted to inkjet, and still use it, even though I have a **GDW** surplus **Apple Laserwriter**. I seldom need things printed these days, except for the occasional snail-mail letter.

Now: **GDW** is no longer using computers, but I'm still working with PC compatibles (my newest is a **Compaq**, but I'm still using a very old **Dell** for some things).

Typesetting

Then: **GDW** used an out of house typesetting bureau for our first few games, but soon acquired an **IBM Electronic Selectric Typesetter** (the main difference between the typesetter and the typewriter was that the typesetter came with a mag card memory system and a wider variety of golf ball fonts). We soon replaced this with a **Compugraphic MCS Modular Composition System**, and eventually replaced the **MCS** with a **Mac** and a laser printer.

Now: I don't even know the details of **SJ Games** typesetting system . . . I am not involved in that end of things any more. I do my personal PDFs using **MS Word** converted to PDF by **Adobe Acrobat**.

Editing and Layout

Then: Editing was done by your truly, except that Marc preferred to have the final editing pass on his works. Initially, layout was done by pasting galleys to pages (and the less said about that process the better). Eventually, the finish pages, with artwork in place, were send out to the printer, who photographed the pages, made printing plates, and printed/collated/bound the final product (unless die-cutting was involved—that was sent out to a specialty place).

Now: At **SJG**, editing, proofreading, layout, and what used to be called paste-up are now done electronically. The final product is converted to PDF and sent to the printer (who is, as often as not, in China these days) via the internet.

Printing

Then: **GDW** used a wide variety of professional printers, some of them across town, some across the state (Illinois), and some of them across the country.

Now: I am not involved in printing at **SJG**, but do know that they still use printers in Austin, Texas, and in the USA, as well as overseas vendors, depending on circumstances.

Artwork

Then: What little artwork I did in the old days was pencil and pen. I eventually discovered something called **Drawing Table**, and began producing floorplans and the like.

Now: Now, I use a series of products by **ProFantasy: Campaign Cartographer 2, Dungeon** D**esigner,** and **City Designer** for the PDFs I sell (all of these programs are available through **Warehouse 23**.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My friend and college professor, Dr. David MacDonald, labeled my scrawl as such, and was one of the few people besides myself who could read it. Because of my script, I tend to print, especially when communicating with others (30 years later, looking at some of the preserved pads, I can barely read them myself . . . hence John Harshman's claim that my handwriting is merely an aid to my memory, and I remember everything I ever wrote rather than actually read it).

May 19, 2008, Holding Up After 30 Years

Most people, reading the title of this editorial, will think it is referring to **Traveller**. It goes without saying that **Traveller** is holding up well after 30 years, so I wont.*

What I was thinking about was how many things have held up as inspiration for **Traveller** adventures, and I wanted to discuss one in particular that recently came to mind:

I received a gift subscription to **Netflix** as a Christmas present, and I have been taking advantage of their collection of television shows from years past to renew my acquaintance with a few gems. One of these is British series (shown over here on **PBS**) called **The Sandbaggers.** This show ran in the late 1970s (the DVDs come with a warning that the originals are not up to modern standards and may not be as sharp as more recent shows), but they are well-written, well-directed, and well-acted. All the episodes are worth watching, but the first (titled **First Principles**) will give you an idea of the RPG potential: The main character is Neil Burnside, D-Ops (Director of Operations) of the **SIS** (aka **MI-6****), and the show centers around him and his three special agents nicknamed sandbaggers. In the first episode, Burnside is pressured by his superiors into mounting an operation to help the Norwegians (who have lost a spy plane inside the USSR). The Norwegians want the SIS to parachute into the USSR, destroy the plane and bring the crew and scientists out—in return the Norwegians will agree to buy a missile system from the British instead of the USA. Burnside prepares his people for the mission, but the Norwegians think he's dragging his feet, and go to the **CIA** instead (making the same missile-related offer), but don't bother to tell Burnside, so his sandbaggers drop into the USSR just in time to watch the **CIA** operatives and the stranded Norwegians blunder onto a Soviet military complex (which the sandbaggers know about, due to their superior preparation) and get captured. The sandbaggers escape undetected, and the **CIA** gets the blame for causing an international incident.

Other episodes are a little creepy (Burnside ends up driving a woman to suicide and is forced to order the assassination of several of his agents to prevent them from revealing secrets including his lover), and some of the plots are a little convoluted: We learn that the chief enemies of **MI-6** are the **KGB, MI-5,** and the British political establishment, in that order. The series is a wonderful source of RPG ideas, and has held up very well over the years.***

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Well, I won't say it any more than I just did. :)

** One of the added features is a Acronym Guide translating **KGB, CIA, UK, SIS, SBS, DGI, IK, D- Ops, D-Int, MI-5, MI-6** and a myriad others.

*** Except for the hairstyles . . .

Jun 02, 2008, Technical Limitations

Oddly enough, for an author of science fiction RPGs and adventures, I am not technically very literate. My expertise is in the co-called "soft" sciences (history, primarily), and it often causes me problems when I have to interact with the technological world. Right now, I'm dealing with the conversion to digital television.*

We all have our limits, I have found, even the most tech savvy. Consider, for example, the case of my father. Born in 1912, my father grew up when the "bleeding edge" was either radio or the automobile (depending on who you ask). Dad was a competent "shade tree mechanic" who preferred to perform his own automotive maintenance why pay somebody to do something you can do for yourself. He also had a pretty good working knowledge of radio: he built one from junk when he was 15.

When I say "junk," I mean random things he found in a junkyard . . . not radio parts. Sometimes, when I tell people about this, they find it difficult to believe that anyone could build something as complex as a radio from scrap copper wire and a varnished oatmeal box. When I was 13, he helped me build one as a project for a Boy Scout merit badge, and showed me the basics. I had a kit of parts that the scouts provided, so I didn't need to salvage the copper wire from an electric motor coil or scavenge an earpiece from a discarded telephone (the tuning crystal was the only thing he bought). Not a transistor or a vacuum tube in it . . . and it worked pretty good. If you were close enough to a station, you didn't even need batteries . . . the energy of the broadcast was all the power you needed.

When I was growing up (in the 50s and 60s) Dad repaired radios and TVs for friends and relatives. He had a cabinet filled with spare vacuum tubes and resistors and breadboards and all sorts of cool electrical stuff salvaged from things others had thrown away. Technologically, my dad was no slouch.

He had his limits, however. Things eventually got too complex for him. He stopped messing with car repairs when distributors were replaced by circuit boards. Printed circuits and transistors replaced vacuum tubes, and he stopped tinkering with radios. He couldn't program a VCR to record movies while he slept, and amassed a collection of John Wayne films only by calling on me or my nephew to program the thing for him. I had to set his digital watch for him when it was time to go to daylight savings time. We kids gave my parents a microwave for Christmas one year, and we had to write out the sequence of buttons on a recipe card we taped to the side of the oven so he could re-heat his coffee or cook bacon.

I can set the clock on my VCR, and hook up a DVD player through my RF modulator, but I'm out of my depth with computer programming and can barely operate a cell phone (since I still don't own one, this is not a major problem so far).

My nephew is pretty much at sea when it comes to high tech, just like me. He has to get his kids to load songs onto his **iPod** . . . I wonder what the limits on my great nephew are going to turn out to be? :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I have a very old TV set (it is older then several **SJ Games** employees) that I cannot afford to replace right now, and I managed to get one of the governments discount coupons to give me a $40 discount on a converter box. My main concern is that I have no way of knowing whether or not the box will work with my particular setup (my set is so old it is not even "cable ready" so I have to use an RF modulator box to play dvds. What makes this all a crisis is that the coupon expires soon, so I have to decide which model of box to buy and then wait until February to find out if it is going to work.

Jun 16, 2008, It's a Crime

I am occasionally asked why so many of the early **Traveller** adventures involved the player characters in criminal (or at least morally questionable) acts. The main reference is my own **76 Patrons,** which contains several adventure seeds that require the adventurers to engage in burglary/robbery/breaking and entering, smuggling, computer hacking, and other actions of questionable legality. The answer I usually give is "ThatÂ's how our **D&D** adventures went." Which is true for some of our earlier efforts, but not for all of them. The main reason is that I thought it was a good idea at the time.

People play RPGs for several reasons, but the main attraction I found was the opportunity to (vicariously) do things I wouldn't dream of doing in the (so-called) real world. I played a thief on several occasions, but most of the time I was a fighter, and our group was usually involved in breaking into some castle/stronghold/cave complex owned by an evil wizard/high priest/oppressive warlord, usually to retrieve some highly valuable artifact (often magic or ensorcelled), either for a patron or for our own use. At least once, we were seeking seven highly powerful wands with an eye toward destroying them to prevent their use by a cabal of evil overlords.

When I was writing **76 Patrons**, I had almost no experience at creating RPG adventures* and I took inspiration from caper movies, detective shows, and written thrillers of various sorts. I leave it up to the gentle readers to determine the inspiration for each particular seed in **76 Patrons**, but I admit that several of them were adapted from plots in a TV detective show of the 1970s, The **Rockford Files.** The hero (Jim Rockford, played by James Garner) was a private detective who regularly carried lock picks and bent the law on numerous occasions (breaking and entering, burglarizing to get evidence to clear a client, etc.), all in the name of justice, of course. It can be argued that Jim Rockford was another in a long tradition of lovable rogues including the earlier Garner character, **Maverick** (from the 1960s TV series of the same name), as well as Robin Hood, Willie Sutton, and the Jesse James of legend. I didn't give a great deal of thought to the moral implications of the adventures I wrote in **76 Patrons**, and I viewed them as mere entertainment, and harmless escapism.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Although I had written/designed several board wargames . . . the arts are considerably different.

Jun 30, 2008, A Brilliant Idea

First of all, I have to say that every time I see this phrase, I think of **A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,** for reasons which I will explain below.*

The inspiration of which I speak is the concept that people could play an RPG as a

solitaire game—but not in the way most people think. Marc Miller came up with this idea a short time after **Traveller** was published, and as far as I know it was not in reaction to any consumer demand. Indeed, I think if we (**GDW**) had decided to respond to a consumer demand for solitaire play it would have been as some form of "choose your own" adventure(s) or one of the other typical "solo gaming" arrangements typical in the gaming magazines of the 1970s and 80s.

Marc wrote that people who could not find a group to play with as often as they would like could still "play **Traveller**" on their own not only by creating pre-generated characters (as most games would allow), but also by creating worlds, systems, subsectors, and sectors, by designing starships, and by engaging in purely mechanical "trade and commerce" using the trade rules in the game and a group of worlds (either one of the published regions or one they created for themselves).

Gaming groups were sometimes hard to find in the early days of RPGs. People would put up a 3"x5" card or a flyer on a bulletin board at a hobby shop, school, or community center and hope for the best.** Others relied on word of mouth, or simply sitting in a public place playing a game, in the hopes of attracting other interested parties. Sometimes these tactics worked, but sometimes they didn't. Even when they did, it was not always possible for people to meet as often as their passion for a particular game demanded. Too much time between gaming "fixes" and the attraction could fade. Fans assigned to submarines and the like, with no other fans available, found this to be a special problem.

Marc's simple idea meant that people who could not find people to play with on a daily/weekly/monthly basis could still satiate their desire to "play" and keep their interest in **Traveller** fresh, even while 500 feet under water or inside a quonset hut at a weather station in Little America.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* At one point in the plot, Pseudolus (Zero Mostel) and Hysterium (Jack Gilford) are wracking their brains for a solution to an increasingly convoluted problem when Mostel perks up and shouts "Wait . . . a brilliant idea!" Gilford asks "What, What!" and Mostel face sinks into despair once again and he replies: "That's what we need . . . a brilliant idea."

** I met people who would eventually form **GDW** through a flyer posted at the **Illinois State University Student Union**, advertising the formation of a strategic games club on campus. It was rather brilliant, consisting of a handful of unit counters from board wargames strewn on a copy machine, and the headline "If you know what these are, come to the Union cafeteria Tuesday at 7:00 PM." It worked admirably.

Jul 14, 2008, Brits in Space

I have it on very good authority that very few British folks consider Brit to be pejorative, and I certainly do not intend it as such.* One of the things that is often said about **Traveller** is that it can be summarized as "*Yanks in Space*"—meaning that the games background culture is basically that of 20th Century America transferred (with very little modification) to five thousand years into the future.

The main reason for this is that we (**GDW**) wanted people to find the game comfortably familiar. Another reason is that we were Americans (Yanks if you will) and we were writing for an audience we presumed consisted mostly of other Americans. We never dreamed the game would achieve the huge non-American fandom that it eventually did.

Anyway, here are a few British cultural influences on the game:

The Navy: **The Imperial Navy** is (ultimately) inspired by the **British Royal Navy**. Marc's father served in the **US Navy** and he was brought up in a naval household. Because of this, the **Imperial Navy** in **Traveller** copies the **US Navy**, but since the **US Navy** (and practically every other navy in the world since **Trafalgar)** copies the **Royal Navy,** the **Imperial Navy** should seem vaguely familiar to anyone familiar with the **Royal Navy**.

Nobility: We took most of the details of the nobility in **Traveller** from the system outlined in **Burkes Peerage**, and much of the etiquette involved came from British authors. American nobility tends to be movie/sports stars and old moneyed families, so our view of what actual nobility is like is a little unusual.

Mercenaries: When writing **Book 4: Mercenary,** we patterned things after real-world mercenaries—or at least our understanding of them. The real soldiers of fortune we were familiar with were mainly British and were written up in books like Forsyth's **The Dogs of War.** There is, of course, some influence from the *Legion Etrangere* in **Traveller,** but the common nickname for the French in America does have pejorative connotations . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* At a convention, I once had the great pleasure of dining with an Australian gamer, a Canadian gamer, and two British gamers (one from London and one from Manchester), and we spent most of the time gleefully trying to imitate each other's accents. During this marathon session, one of the Britishers asked me if Americans were offended at being called *Yanks* (I had to give a rather involved answer**) and I asked in turn about the offensive nature of Brits.

** The answer is, of course, that it varies. *Yank or Yankee* means different things to different parts of America. To someone from the so-called Old South it is an insult to be called *Yank/Yankee*. To most of the rest of the country, *Yankee* means someone from New England, and to some New Englanders, it means a person from Vermont. Most Americans don't take offense at being called *Yank* and some find I flattering. I'm sure the internet can supply much more information (and a great deal of nonsense) on this subject. To my father, *Yankee* (in addition to describing people from the **Pepperidge Farm** commercials) was a term to be applied to some clever gadget, the main example being a Yankee screwdriver, which is a spiral-and-spring contraption that operates by pushing you can still buy them, although they are sometimes called push screwdrivers.

Jul 28, 2008, "It Was Thirty Years Ago Today . . . "

Another anniversary . . . sort of. Well it wasn't exactly today. But about thirty years ago, Marc had convinced the rest of the **GDW** *Powers that be* that **Traveller** would benefit from additional products, and had put together a system of proposed supplements, adventures, and double adventures that every fan should at least be familiar with. Frank Chadwick had honchoed **Book 4, Mercenary** into print, and Marc had put together **Supplement 1, 1001 Characters.** And it was about 30 years ago that **GDW** discovered the mystical math of RPG sales:

In the 1970s, RPG sales curves (like most other sales curves), showed an initial sharp rise that leveled off for a period of time, then began to drop off.* The additional **Traveller** products showed the same general sales curve, but we noticed a very interesting thing—in addition to the initial sales of the supplementary product, there was a slight bump in the sales of the basic rules. This bump leveled off quickly, and began to drop again, but the rate of decrease was less steep than it had been previously. With each additional product, there

was the same boost to the sales of the basic rules, and the same slight decrease in the drop off afterwards. Additional products didn't help the sales of other supplementary products, but every one had a greater or lesser effect on the sales of the basic product.

We weren't the first to discover this, of course, but it was an epiphany to us notwithstanding. Instead of working on releasing several additional RPGs in 1978 and 1979, as we had originally planned, we devoted that effort to producing additional **Traveller** products.

Another thing we learned roughly 30 years ago was that each subsequent print run for the basic black box sold out sooner than the previous one, and that doubling or tripling the number printed did not seem to help us keep the game in stock. We didn't want to simply tell the printers "Give us a gazillion copies" because we didn't want to have more than a years supply in stock at any one time.** Part of the problem was assembly time. We had three part-time college students assembling games, and a small shrink wrap machine we had acquired when **GDW** purchased John Hill's **Conflict Game Company** in early 1977 (or late 1976, I can't remember). The problem was that assembling and wrapping **Traveller** was taking time away from assembly and wrapping the other games we produced.

We found a solution in a local organization that provided jobs for the disabled—they did simple assembly work (including shrink wrapping) and their prices were quite low. We were quite popular with them because we had a steady amount of work which did not require a great deal of training ("Open the black box, take one of each of the books, 1, 2, and 3, put them in the box and close it.") so they could set up an assembly line at any time and assign as many workers as they had available. We were one of the organizations steadier employers, and won several civic awards for helping to employ the handicapped.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* These general features remain true today, but the drop off after the first few weeks is much steeper now then back then, for reasons I won't go into.

** It's a tax thing. **Google** for **Thor Power Tools** if you're curious.

Aug 11, 2008, Science and Fiction

One of the interesting things about being in the SF RPG business for 30+ years is seeing how things repeat themselves from time to time. One of these is the discussion of what science fiction is, exactly, and whether or not **Traveller** is a science fiction role-playing game.

Many years ago, a popular gaming magazine ran an article about science fiction and games. The authors contention was that everything* that SF RPGs take for granted is wrong. Faster than light travel is impossible, settlement of the other worlds in the solar system is never going to happen, space travel will be accomplished by machines because manned expeditions are irrational. Life on alien worlds probably doesn't exist, because if it did, they would have contacted us by now if they were interested in looking. There was a sizable discussion of how space combat was unlikely, illogical, and downright silly. And things continued in this same vein for several pages.

Frank Chadwick said the article should have been titled: *I Have Seen the Future—and It is DULL!*

What I found really amazing about some of the fans of **GDW**s RPG **Space: 1889** was how they continually tried to come up with 20th century explanations for our 19th century scientific advances. One of the reasons we decided to do the game was because it no longer required us to have a nodding acquaintance with relativity—everything in **Space: 1889** was

good, simple cannonball through the window Newtonian physics, with a couple of departures from strict science-as-it-was-known-then.

One of the most common letters we received explained how it was impossible for our floating airships to tack (I leave the specifics up to the readers to determine), which we at **GDW** all knew very well. If the games antigravity flyers could only move downwind, the game would lose a vast amount of its attraction. We simply chose to ignore this problem (naturally, several fans came up with explanations).

A certain amount of suspension of disbelief is necessary for any science fiction story (or game) to work—otherwise, its not really SF, its a techno-thriller or some other thing. Every time I see a discussion of why **Traveller** isn't really scientific, I can't help but recall several previous versions of the same thing. People sometimes ask me why I don't join in on these discussions . . . I have to answer that I've heard it all before, and it doesn't change my mind.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Or nearly everything . . . I don't remember enough about the article to make a blanket declaration, so I'll give the author the benefit of the doubt.

Aug 25, 2008, Numbers and Me

The day this editorial appears, I'll be flying to Reading, in the UK, where I will be a guest at **Gen-Con, UK**. I always appreciate the opportunity to meet **Traveller** fans, and since this will be my first foray to the UK, I'll be meeting a bunch I haven't run into before. British fans are vocal on the internet, and a few have made it to the US for conventions and such, but for the vast majority of **Traveller** fandom, meeting the creators of their favorite game in person is a rare event.

One of the things that almost always surprises **Traveller** fans when they meet us* is the general lack of what are considered the required "nerd" skill: math. Marc's field was chemistry, which requires a basic grounding in mathematics, but Marc was by no means an expert. Frank was pursuing a masters in speech communication when I met him, and had a pretty good grounding in statistics (which has served him well in gaming). But none of us have any great interest in math beyond the minimum necessary to modern living.

I was a history major, however, and am probably the most innumerate of the original **GDW** crew. I can do the basic four functions, which means I can balance a checkbook and figure a tip (given enough time), but anything really intensive leaves me feeling out of my depth. I have trouble performing mental calculations I cannot multiply two two digit numbers in my head without taking quite a bit of time. I pretty much depend on calculators or paper. I made it through high school physics only by the skin of my teeth (and a slide rule**). Each time a new spaceship design system appears, I am approached by fans who want to create a spreadsheet automating the process—and want me to look over their efforts in the hopes I can help them out. I am seldom of any value to them.

A year or so ago, I ran into a gentleman in a bookstore who was a retired professor of math who noticed I was thumbing a biography of Einstein and we chatted for a bit. I confessed my interest in Einstein was historical, and owned up to my innumeracy. He went into a long speech trying to convince me of the wonder of numbers—clearly he was used to people arguing that math was boring. I told him that I didn't find math boring, I found it impenetrable. He continued with a speech that resembled the introduction to the TV series **Numbers**: "*We all use math every day . . . to handle money, to predict the weather . . .*" and so

on". The conversation ended when I finally convinced him that I knew the wonders of the world of numbers, but I didn't care to dive into it too deep myself.

Frankly, I haven't even seen a quadratic equation in more than 40 years. I know they touch on practically every aspect of my life . . . happily, I don't have to knowingly work with the blasted things at all for them to bless my existence.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* By "us" I mean the primary creators of the game . . . Marc Miller, Frank Chadwick, myself, and the others listed in the credits of the **LBB**s.

** Which reveals how old I am, I think. Is there anyone under the age of 30 who even knows what a "*slipstick*" looks like?

Sep 08, 2008, I Love Conventions

Last week I had the great privilege to be one of the guests at **GenCon UK** in Reading, England. I like being a guest at a convention for several reasons. The main reason is the boost to my ego—spending 4-6 days being treated as a celebrity does wonders for my morale. I enjoy meeting **Traveller** fans, I enjoy meeting industry professionals and "talking shop," and I enjoy the opportunity to travel, especially to places I have never visited before.

This particular trip required me to renew my passport, which involved filling out a number of forms and spending a fair amount of time waiting in line. The difference between my new and my old photos was a little demoralizing (my beard has acquired a "skunk stripe" of off-white down the middle).

I packed my bags, called a cab to take me to the airport, and met with what some would call an omen as I left my apartment. As I turned to lock the door, I noticed a brown lump on the transom I took to be a crumpled wad of leaves or brown paper. I poked it with the toe of my shoe (intending to sweep it off the landing and down to the ground) when it began to move. I had never encountered a Mexican free-tailed bat at that range, and I took a step back. My memory offered two facts: 1) bats can carry rabies and a couple of other nasty diseases; and 2) it is rather unusual to see them in the daytime on stairwell landings. The bat crawled slowly towards me, but veered off when I tapped my foot, choosing instead to move to the edge of the landing. Another tap of my foot induced it to leap over the edge and flutter off. I presume it found some safer perch—my apartment complex has a number of roving cats and dogs which would have found it an interesting chew toy.

I made it to the airport without incident, but upon arrival I discovered that my flight was running two hours late and this would probably worsen as time passed. This was pointed out to me by an observant ticket agent who offered to change my flight to an earlier one that would probably also be delayed, but would probably arrive in Atlanta in time for me to make my connecting flight. Which I did.

The flight to London was long and cramped—I had less room on the 267 widebody than I did on the plane from Austin to Atlanta. I spent most of the time trying to sleep wedged into a seat that my legs were 2" too long to accommodate comfortably (pretty much par for the course for me and airline seats). The movies were **Prince Caspian** and **Twenty-One,** neither of which I was interested enough in to uncoil the earphones.

I arrived in London assured I would be met by a cab driver who knew where I was supposed to go. I had no clue, because the address of the place I was supposed to go to was "**Black Horse House, Whiteknights, University of Reading**" (Americans will understand my confusion). All went well, and I was met on the campus by the guest liaison, shown to

my room, and then taken to dinner six hours later.

In the next four days at the convention. My room was in a campus conference/guest house that was centrally located, and close enough for me to walk to my seat at the autograph table or the building where my "meet-n-greet" seminars were. I met a large number of very enthusiastic British and European fans, signed many autographs, and met with the kind folks from **BITS and Mongoose**.* By the way, if you're ever in Reading, there's a very good Chinese restaurant called **Futura** that I can recommend very highly.

In addition to the aforementioned fans, I got to meet Colin Baker (one of my favorite **Dr Who**s), a number of very talented artists, and a couple of authors. One of the most amusing events at the whole show, however, was this:

Sitting in the midst of several artists busily sketching and so on, I felt the need to do something creative, so I took a sheet from one of the notepads supplied with the convention logo and folded a paper airplane. One of my fellow VIPs jokingly suggested I put a price on it, so I put my initials on the wings and wrote out a note that said: "Prototype Spacecraft: Ten pounds or Best Offer." A few hours later, I signed an autograph for a fan who offered me a ten pound note, and I refused (I do not charge for autographs). He offered me a pound coin for the airplane, and I accepted.

The con wasn't a total loss, despite the bad omen at the start.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The upshot of which is that I will be writing a few things for **Mongoose Traveller** in the near future, the first one coauthored with Martin Dougherty.

Sep 22, 2008, Butterflies, et al

A few more entries in the "*you can't make up stuff this good*" listing:

Butterfly Migrations: Every year, Austin (and much of eastern Texas) is treated to a monarch butterfly migration. The little orange-and-black insects are highly visible on the radiators of cars in my apartment parking lot, with an almost equal number visible fluttering around in the weeds and bushes surrounding the aforementioned lot. Several communities have monarch festivals (Mission, Texas has the most famous, I'm told). The thing is, if I were to make up a Bestiary entry in which millions of insects, weighing less than an ounce each, migrated thousands of miles, it would be greeted by no small degree of skepticism by the gentle readers.

The Platypus*: When I was a child, my mother had an Australian woman as a pen-pal, and she would send presents for my family at Christmas. These included a set of Australian children's books, which, typically for the genre, featured stories about the adventures of anthropomorphized animals, but these were sea turtles, kangaroos, echidnas, and platypuses. I read them and had my first episode of juvenile skepticism: Like the first European naturalists to receive written descriptions of the critter, I found it hard to believe in a duck-billed mammal that laid eggs. A quick reference to the family encyclopedia convinced me that they were genuine, but they remained a minor fascination of mine for several years. Nevertheless, they remain one of the strangest critters on the planet, surpassed, IMO, only by the pangolin and a few other rarities from the past, such as castoroides (I've often wondered of the **US Army Corps of Engineers** is attempting to clone these critters for use in flood control).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Sometimes referred to as "the duckbilled platypus, " but this seems unnecessary to me, since there is no other type of platypus.

Oct 06, 2008, Sometimes I wonder

Sometimes I wonder if **Traveller** fans who are professional cultural anthropologists spend as much time dissecting the game (and discussing its "errors" as the physicists, astronomers, computer techs, etc., do. I used to wonder if economist fans did this, but since more of them are bring their discussions to my attention, I don't have any remaining curiosity.

Something similar happens with TV shows. My nephew is an EMT by profession, and I have relatives who are registered nurses and other medical professionals. Watching a medical show on television with any of these people has become a bit of a trial, since each of them has trouble just watching the show without commenting on how the show differs from reality. I don't have any friends/relatives who are in law enforcement, but I understand from those that do that something similar happens. Professional crime scene technicians are rumored to be vocal about the various "howlers" in such shows. I'm not sure of the underlying reasons behind this phenomenon . . . I'm sure part of it is a pride in their chosen profession (and a part of it is a desire to correct "misimpressions" about their profession), just as a part of it is to impress others, among other things. Similar things happen with other forms of entertainment as well.

I used to wonder if people talking on cell phones in public places realized how silly they can look. In the early days, before they became as commonplace as they are now, people who walked down the street engaged in an animated conversation with someone who wasn't physically present were shunned, especially on public transit.

Now, of course, everyone can see a plethora of examples of what they look like, although I strongly suspect that the principle of "They may look silly but I can't possibly look that bad." operates here as it does elsewhere.

Finally, sometimes I wonder what totally deranged behavior that is commonplace nowadays will be viewed as perfectly normal in he future. Several years ago I used to ride a bus on which one of the regulars used to talk to himself (this was before cellphones). Occasionally, these discussions would become quite animated, and sometimes developed into arguments. On very rare occasions, he would haul off and clock himself in the jaw (at which point the bus driver usually expelled him from the vehicle).*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I leave it up to the readers to come up with other examples.

Oct 20, 2008, Playing Myself

From time to time in my youth, various people (either in person, in print, or through electronic media*) would urge me to "be myself" (whatever that meant . . . my response was always "Who else can I possibly be?"). When I began to play RPGs (**D&D** at first, then others), the notion occurred to almost everyone I gamed with that it would be fun/cool/interesting/etc. to rate oneself in game terms and "play yourself" in some fictional world.

Over the years, I have been involved in several attempts at this sort of thing:

My first was a short-lived attempt at **D&D**, to be DMed by one of the **GDW** RPG hangers-on (a sort of playtest group/fan club/gaming group) who never really managed to get the game going, but had a long and complex method of determining our game stats. I remember qualifying as **Intelligence and Wisdom 18** . . . my strength was somewhat less . . .).

Next was my attempt at historical gaming : the plan was that everyone who showed up for the regular weekly game at the **GDW** offices would be mysteriously transferred to Germany in the 1640s, with their equipment consisting of the clothes on their backs, the contents of their pockets, and whatever was in their backpacks. Although I prepared a large number of maps and other notes (based on one of my history classes of a year or two before), I'm sorry to say the game never got beyond the first session, where everyones stats were created.

The third foray into "being myself" actually managed to last several sessions. A **GDW** staffer decided to rate everyone up in advance and play a combination of **Cthulhu Now** and **Dark Conspiracy**, set in an unspecified Midwestern state. The **GDW** crew, on its way to a fictional Midwestern convention, found itself in the midst of a mysterious event which required us to be quarantined along with a few hundred other travelers. Allegedly, we had been exposed to a contagious disease, but the details were contradictory. My theory was that it would turn out to be a UFO landing, but the real world intervened (as it so often does) before the campaign could go very far, and everything was called off because the core group of players could not make it to enough sessions for a satisfactory conclusion. I never did find out what was really going on.

Interestingly enough, we never thought to try the notion in one of the **Traveller** playtests. I'm not sure why, but it never came up.

As the years pass, I am less enthusiastic about "playing myself" especially right now, with my shoulder still stiff from a tumble I took a couple of weeks ago. I suspect many of the gentle readers feel the same although I wouldn't mind trying it if I could use one of my "prior characters."

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My youth does not, as some would joke, pre-date electronic media radio and television were both born before I was.

Nov 03, 2008, High Rise

As a sideline, I create floor plans and deckplans for sale as PDFs (available through **e23**—just search for Loren Wiseman). One of the projects I have "in progress" is a series of buildings associated with a large downport (the ground facilities of a starport). One of these is a sizable arcology, a building intended to provide everything that a small town supplies, under one roof. I've only roughed in some basic parameters at the moment, largely because urban planning is not one of my strong points, and designing an arcology is urban planning with a vengeance. Combined with this, however, is the need to look into the architectural design of high rise buildings, a field in which I am likewise not an expert.* I have, however engaged in some creative speculation, which requires no formal education whatsoever.

There have been considerable advances in materials science over the last century or so. The construction of the first skyscrapers made use of the (then) new technology of steel girder and concrete construction. By the 1970s, new materials and techniques resulted in buildings that were considerably less dense (8-9 pounds per cubic foot, as opposed to 30-

40 pounds per cubic foot**), and thus could reach higher into the air. The last three decades have seen sizable advances as well. By the time of the 1100s Imperial, and the use of advanced materials such as crystal-iron and unobtanium, construction of buildings of previously unimaginable heights should be possible. Extremely tall buildings have other problems, however, and advanced materials will solve only some of them.

Something that occurs to me as I sketch out my skyscraper is that the higher a building goes the more the problems of wind-induced sway come into play. Every building moves with the wind to a certain degree, and extremely tall ones do so by amounts that are detectable by the occupants. Beyond a certain level, this sway becomes intolerable, and steps have to be taken to neutralize it, or advances in motion-sickness medication will also be required. Stronger materials will enable future buildings to resist sway, but other technologies may come into play. Future architects might use contragravity or maneuver drive technology, under computer control, to counteract the effects of the wind.

Another use of M-drives in a building might be to add an additional safety factor to prevent catastrophic damage (from earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.) from bring a building down too quickly. They needn't be enough to make the building fly, just enough to slow things down if things go bad and make a catastrophe more survivable.

Air/rafts and other flyers will have other changes in building design, it seems to me. Will most of the traffic entering a building be hundreds of feet in the air? Will there be enough foot traffic (people walking in the extensive parklands surrounding an arcology, perhaps?) to allow the normal percentage of shops and the like on the bottom of a skyscraper, or will most of these be adjacent to the "air/raft parking" located 1/3- or 1/2-way up the building? Will there still be penthouse apartments on the top of skyscrapers when they might be overflown by anyone with an air/raft (which will be as common as automobiles in the **Traveller** universe?

A few other things occur to me: will larger buildings require more elevators? Will these be contragrav powered, and thus capable of horizontal as well as vertical movement (as well as being used as emergency escape pods)? Will there be sections (or perhaps entire floors) devoted to water tanks, for sanitary as well as firefighting purposes)?

There are many other little niggling details involved in roughing out a future skyscraper, and I'm sure I have only touched the surface in my speculations. I'm keeping a growing file of thoughts, and will eventually incorporate them into several PDF products.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Had I known that game design would require me to acquire PhDs in chemistry, physics, electrical, mechanical, and aeronautical engineering, advanced mathematics, economics, sociology, anthropology (both cultural and physical), biology, ecology, astronomy, and planetology I would have spent my college years differently.
** Balsa wood, for those interested, is about 10 pounds per cubic foot.

Nov 17, 2008, Odds Are

The odds are that most of you are wondering why this issue was late. Basically, I have been trying to use two computers to do the job of one. My old machine (closing on 8 years old now, and positively doddering by modern standards) is dying by inches, gradually losing the ability to open programs. My newer machine (young enough to come with Windows XP installed) is also experiencing some issues, primarily connected with the modem. Basically, I can use the old machine for email and (sometimes) for connecting to the inter-

net, and the new machine for practically everything else, except connecting to the internet. But enough of my problems . . .

I ran across an interesting story related to a previous editorial about how reality can be vastly more "unrealistic" than fiction. It seems that in 1980, a group of people drilling for oil near Lake Peigneur, Louisiana caused a slight* disturbance: At about 1200 feet below the surface, the drill bit punched into the **Diamond Crystal Salt Mine** (you'd think a preliminary site survey would have turned this up, wouldn't you?), which allowed water to penetrate the mine, and (after a certain amount of ominous rumbling, one presumes) collapsed the bottom of the lake. According to **The Straight Dope:** "In the spectacular whirlpool of destruction that followed, 65 acres of land, 11 barges, two drill rigs, and a tugboat (but, miraculously, no people) literally went down the drain."

If I had included that in a **Traveller** adventure, the sound of disbelief suspenders snapping would be detectable from the Moon. You can't make up stuff this good!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* "*Slight*" in geologic terms, much as "*recent*" in geologic terms can mean "*within the last 80,000,000 years or so.*"

Dec 01, 2008, Speed Bumps

Progress seems to be one of the features of the (so-called) modern world. **Traveller** fans have generally come to terms with the fact that the society of the game stays pretty much the same over centuries, but many remark that the present rate of scientific and technological advancement is not reflected in the game.

I was recently re-reading **Wonderful Life** by the late Steven J. Gould, and found a short discussion of why it took so long to revisit and re-examine the famous Burgess Shale fossils, correcting some mistakes (at least one involved mistaking parts of the same animal for at least three different species!). I found some of the lesser points more interesting now than I did when I first read the book (more than a decade ago), and I think they apply to our present society as much or more as they did a century ago:

1: One factor that has a major dampening effect on follow-up studies is the fame of the originator of a particular idea. Charles Walcott was the first to devote major scrutiny to the fossils of the Burgess shale in Canada, and later scholars were hesitant to re-examine his work while he was alive becasue of the force of his personality. Walcott was a major figure in geology and many other sciences, serving in a number of major scientific posts of the early 20th century (including **Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution**, **President of the National Academy of Sciences, Chairman of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics,**** and others). Had Walcott been less dominant and territorial, his students and others might have followed up on his work sooner. Walcott's widow also exercised a psychological control over her husband's studies, blocking follow-up work by her disapproval of certain students—she did not support further excavations on her late husband's claim on the Burgess fossil beds. It is not hard to come up with similar figures who dominated other sciences until quite long after their deaths—Margaret Mead is one example from anthropology.

2: A second and less obvious reason is purely physical, but no less real. Gould's interviews revealed that the Burgess specimens were freely available at the **Smithsonian**, but that they were located on high, inaccessible shelves, and were not easily available for study—Gould notes several major discoveries that have been made by casual browsing in the speci-

men trays of museums, most notably the final identification of the conodont animal (an interesting story in its own right). Evidently invertebrate paleontologists were scarce in the early 1900s.

It is interesting to imagine some scientific advance in the **OTU** that has been delayed because the data are not readily available, for whatever reason.

3: The final reason which Gould lists is something which I would not have credited until a few months ago. Evidently, until very recently, the Burgess specimens were stored in a building that was not air-conditioned. Since most researchers are also teachers, they have only the summer months available for their private research, and anyone who has been to the Washington D.C. area in the summer months can appreciate why few would be willing to spend it in a poorly ventilated warehouse. My personal experience confirmed that when my apartments air conditioner failed just as an unprecedented heat wave hit Austin. After a few days, I found my mental processes almost completely shut down, and I could barely think straight. I found the most comfortable posture was sleeping in front of a fan, which also gave me a new insight on where the custom of the siesta came from.

It is a stretch to apply things like this to the sluggish growth of technology in the **Traveller Third Imperium** background. Still, several cultures in history have lasted for hundreds of years and remained essentially unchanged. I leave the location of examples as an exercise to the reader.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I wonder what these same people would say if every year there were new technology books issued . . . each radically changing the society and culture of the **Official Traveller Universe.** Actually, I don't wonder much at all I think I have a pretty good idea what most of them would say.

** Which some readers will recognize as a precursor to **NASA**.

Dec 15, 2008, A Question of Safety

For some reason, in science fiction stories, certain features never seem to get treatment commensurate with their importance in real life. I was amused when, in the early 1990s, I bought a model kit of the **Millennium Falcon** with a complete interior—I thought it could be converted to **Traveller** miniatures play relatively easily, since it was close enough to 25mm scale* for my needs.

I opened the box and began some trial assemblies, and discovered that the interior consisted of a fairly detailed cockpit, and a couple of corridors. Nothing else. No staterooms (although none were shown in the movie), no accommodation for crew or passengers (including a distressing lack of toilet facilities), and (rather shocking for an alleged merchant ship) no cargo bays! It was after I got over this shock, I discovered there wasn't a lot of room left for fuel or engines either. It was an impressive model, however, provided one didn't look too close at the inside. :)

Few writers spend a lot of time discussing the various safety features that must be present in any reasonable spacecraft design (although I do remember a novel devoted to a disaster involving a passenger liner that required passengers and crew to take to the lifeboats—the title was **Lifeboat**, appropriately enough, and the author was James White. The need for lifeboats in deep space, like almost everything else connected with **Traveller,** universe, is a matter of some discussion, and I don't propose to repeat it here.

One of the first safety-related items to be described in **Traveller** was a write-up of the

rescue ball (in the old print version of **JTAS**). Some people wrote in to question the realism of the rescue ball, but since it was based on an item being developed by **NASA f**or use on the space shuttle and elsewhere, we felt it had ample precedent. I felt the basic idea was sound since it seemed to me that one of the most pressing needs in a decompression situation would be some means of protection against vacuum and near vacuum that could be donned quickly and easily in an emergency.

Further consideration of the subject of decompression lead to a couple of other thoughts. First, the biggest danger from decompression, I felt, was not explosive decompression, but a gradual leak. Slow decompression can overcome victims without them realizing it, and can cause major problems long before loss of consciousness. For this reason, I reasoned that every compartment on every spaceship must have detectors for loss of air pressure, and visual/auditory/tactile alarms when pressure falls below a certain level.

Second, I felt that there must be some means of determining if there was air on the other side of a door before you opened it. Airtight hatches connecting compartments on a spaceship seemed a reasonable precaution to me, but in the case of a disaster, there would have to be some reliable means of preventing people from accidentally opening the hatch to a depressurized chamber.** I never worked out the precise design, but I imagined it to be a simple button in the middle of the door that would provide a visual and tactile clue that there was air pressure on the other side of the door.

I have several thoughts on the notions of fire in spacecraft, but these I will leave for another time. I still have the **Millennium Falcon** kit, sitting on a shelf in my closet. I ran into it the other day while looking for something else, and it inspired the subject of this essay.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There were several 25mm scales even in those days, even though this was before scale creep had gone so far as to create 25mm figures that were 30-35mm in height, My requirements were that the models corridors accommodate the washers I used for miniatures bases in those days, and the figures not look too outsized compared to the chairs and such.

** Of course, a differential in pressure would be a clue, but I would want a more reliable means of telling if I'm about to open a hatch into hard vacuum than you can't pull the door open. What if the door opens the other direction. The instant I undog the hatch, it'll be pulled out of my hands, and I think by that point its a bit late.

Dec 29, 2008, Unpredictable?

One of the things about **Traveller** that we* decided early was to make interplanetary and interstellar travel as much like air travel as possible. We incorporated large parts of sea travel into it as well, but we fully intended starports to be as much like airports as we could make them. We all had experience with air travel, after all, and wanted to make a game where (among other things) going from one star to another was as commonplace as flying from one city to another in the 1970s.

What we didn't foresee was that air travel would undergo a paradigm shift.

When we grew up, airline travel had a cachet of romance to it. Flying was cool. Frank Chadwick was very proud that he had once flown on a **Super Constellation** (aka "**Super Connie**"—one of the earliest jet airliners). Even by the late 1970s, airlines emphasized comfort and convenience in their advertising, and incorporated a little sex appeal by their portrayal of stewardesses as little short of flying geishas.

Everyone knows what happened to air travel. What used to be free isn't. Coach class

has become steerage class, with passengers shoehorned in and comforts eliminated. Stewards (male and female) are no longer required to fit weight and age criteria, and may even be openly married (something forbidden into the early 70s). And we all know the frustration of passing through airport security nowadays.

Airline travel has become somehow common—an annoyance, something more like bus or train travel than a cruise (and even those aren't what they used to be either).

Looking back, it is easy to see how we should have been able to predict the change. The inventions of George Pullman (I leave internet research on him and his products to the individual readers) gave rail travel a romance all its own. Long trips were turned into minvacations by seats that converted into bunk beds at night, and a private compartment was reasonably cheap if you wanted to travel without rubbing elbows with your fellow human beings.

And yet—rail travel has become commonplace and banal, despite the efforts of Amtrak to fill it with some of the old romance and adventure. We should have seen it all coming.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* By "we" I mean the original design team at **GDW, Inc**.

2009

Jan 14, 2009, Discussions

One of the things that amuses me about **Traveller** fans is their constant need to discuss aspects of the game.* This is mostly done for its own benefit, but once in a while, someone will ask (words to the effect): "Why didn't **GDW** consider this to begin with?"

Usually, this comes up after the discussion has gone on for several weeks, which is longer by several orders of magnitude than the total amount of time that was devoted to discussion of the same topic during the design of the game. Frank and Marc worked out the trade and commerce rule mechanics, but neither of them was an economist, and they were more interested in making an interesting game than simulating mega-economic systems. They took a day at most, and spent maybe another few hours tweaking the language. Fans spend hundreds of hours dissecting every phrase, and sometimes wonder why we didn't spend more time considering [insert name here].

The reason, of course, is that we were working under a deadline. I doubt Robert E. Howard spent months working out the intricate economic interactions of **Hyboria** before writing ". . . there is little profit in trade with the wary sons of Shem ." I'm pretty sure J. R. R. Tolkien gave very little consideration to economics when creating Middle Earth. Are their creations any less because the details don't add up?

Another question that often comes up is a request for specific details about some item of highly advanced future technology. I was once buttonholed** by a fan who wanted details about the jump drive. Not details about how it worked in game terms, bur details along the lines precisely how it worked, what it looked like, and where he should stick the "No Step" decals. As I remember, my response was something along the lines of "If I knew the circuit diagrams, I'd have patented it. I certainly wouldn't be designing games for a living."

Over the years I have had only one person tell me, evidently in all sincerity, that **GDW** shouldn't have published **Traveller** before everything was worked out in complete detail. I asked him did this mean we should have mapped every world, drawn floorplans of every building, and worked out GDPs for the entirety of Charted Space? His answer was: "Well . . . maybe not every building." But he did want us to have worked out what the plumbing fixtures looked like—for humans and aliens. :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This is not unique to **Traveller** fans, I realize. One of the things the internet allows is a 24/7 talkathon on insignificant details about everything in the known universe and quite a few things beyond.

** Do people still use the word "buttonholed" in conversation? I assume everyone reading this knows what I mean . . . if not, I leave researching the definition to the readers as an extra credit assignment.

Jan 26, 2009, A Matter of Experience

About 15 years ago I realized that despite the fact that things I wrote in the RPG line sold well, I was still a rank amateur compared to some. When **Traveller** was first published, practically everyone was an amateur. We were basically making things up as we went along. By 1977, I had three published game designs to my credit: **Eagles, Caesars Legions** (co-designed with Donald Greenwood of **Avalon Hill**), and Pharsalus, Marc Miller had seven or eight and Frank Chadwick nearly 20 (I may be off by a few—I'm working from memory

here). The point is, as far as RPGs go, we were all inexperienced. Before **Traveller, GDW** had produced exactly one RPG: *En Garde!** and that was written by Frank Chadwick and Darryl Hany. **Traveller** was Marc's first foray into RPGs, and Frank's second. The rest of us involved in providing supplementary design assistance were basically babes in the woods about how to proceed. Marc and Frank eventually achieved experience in systems design. I designed several systems that were never published in addition to working on supplementary products for **Traveller**. It was not until **Twilight: 2000** that I began to get experience in working with system rather than background. I never became really adept at it, at least compared to Frank and Marc or Steve Jackson.

One of the side effects of the longevity of **Traveller** is that **GDW**'s initial efforts at RPG design are still available for all to see. We had no guidelines for how to write RPG adventures, for how to plot them and pace them. People who have written hundreds of such adventures now look at our first efforts and, not realizing their age, criticize us for not having the sophistication they think we should have had. We made all sorts of mistakes in the design of **Traveller,** as well as in marketing and selling the game. Simply put, thirty-plus years ago, we had nothing to guide us.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are some who claim that *En Garde!** was not a roleplaying game, but by the same token, there are people who claim that **Traveller** isn't a roleplaying game either.

Feb 09, 2009, Fandom

I became acquainted with the concept of the toxic fan before **Traveller** was published. When working the **GDW** booth at game conventions, I would encounter one or two people who seemed to love the games, but hate the company. They did not want to interact with the booth staff or the designers of the games (which were often the same people)—they would approach, ask if we had a particular title (the newest release) available, and demand two or three copies. I remember one individual who paid with $100 bills, and responded to our polite attempts at conversation with grunts. They wanted the games, but unlike the majority of fans, didn't want to talk about their enthusiasms at all. Happily, these fans are in a minority.

I have noticed a new category of fans over the years, and they are increasing. These are the fans who have never played the original game—the so-called **Classic Traveller**—but instead came to it by one of the later versions, such as **GURPS Traveller, Traveller 4th Edition, or Traveller T20.** An increasing number of these fans weren't born when the game was published originally.* When I interact with these fans at conventions, they aren't interested in the various "*version wars*" that have taken place over the years. They tend to use whatever version they like best, and are interested in other books mainly as a means of gathering campaign ideas. Some of these fans are completists, and want all the old books, but most are young, on a limited budget, and want to pick and choose things that they can use in their games. Some of these fans acquired some of the gamebooks from garage sales, used bookstores, or older siblings, and became attracted to the game.

A large group dropped out after they left school, and acquired families and/or other responsibilities. As the years pass, they have become increasingly nostalgic for the "good old days" of their youth, and feel "warm fuzzies" for the books. They now have larger disposable incomes then they did when younger, and are making great efforts to fill holes in their collections (lost, thrown out, or otherwise disposed of over the years), and to acquire copies of books they never owned.

Another group of fans never abandoned the game, and continued to play over the years. These are also older fans, and often have attempted (successfully or otherwise) to introduce their children to the game.

Happily, the number of toxic fans has remained about the same in number, and seems to be decreasing in overall percentage.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Something that is inevitable, all things considered.

Feb 23, 2009, Reality and Fiction?

It was Mark Twain who said: "T*ruth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities, truth isn't.*" GMs need to make sense as well, but only within the "reality" of a particular game universe. GMs often use the same plotting techniques as novels, movies, and television shows, which do not necessarily conform to "reality" as we know it. An example of a common plotting technique is presented by the NBC television series **Medium**. The heroine, psychic Allison Dubois, has dreams which (eventually) provide the solutions to assorted crimes in and around Phoenix, Arizona. The way the plot normally proceeds is that Allison has a dream that provides a brief glimpse of some incident, then proceeds to have other dreams and/or visions that accumulate more clues, gradually convincing her mundane husband and her associates at the local district attorney's office that she has solved the mystery. Something that struck me after viewing the show one or two times was how the average RPG group would soon shortcut the plot by noticing that Alison's first two or three attempts at solving the crime are wrong (often ludicrously so) and demanding that she ignore her first few dreams and focus on the later, more informative ones. This, of course, would result in a five or ten minute episode devoid of suspense or drama. The characters in the TV show are no more and no less realistic than the group of adventurers in a game, but they aren't any more realistic either, in terms of their background. The TV episode has needs of pacing and storytelling that transcend the needs of the actors to get to the end of the adventure, collect the loot, and level up.

It is more important, in my opinion that a game and its background make sense in relation to itself than to the real world around us all. This is what I call "perceived reality" – the game background hangs together and makes sense to the players, thus making sense to the characters as well. It is for this reason that the game backgrounds that I have been involved with often play a little fast and loose with details of particle physics and the like.** This is a case of reality and fiction co-existing rather than conflicting.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Lord Byron, G. K. Chesterton, and Leo Rosten expressed similar sentiments, but Mark Twain is funnier than those guys (*IMHO*).

** An example occurs in **GDW's Space: 1889**—sky galleons that fly by means of lift-wood, and are driven by sails or steam-powered propellers. The propellers present no serious problems, but sailing ships need an interface with another medium (sails in air, hull in water) in order to do anything other than move directly downwind (to tack, in nautical terminology). Aerial sailing ships that do nothing but float like dandelion fluff, however, are not the least bit cool, however, so **GDW** ignored the inconvenient physical laws, without

even attempting an explanation (although many of our fans came up with various hand-waves).

Mar 09, 2009, Feeling A Little Out of Place

I'm beginning to understand how my father felt.* I'm falling farther and farther behind in the tech race, some of it because I can't afford to buy every new tech toy that comes along, but mostly because I still can't figure out why I need them.**

Something I've noticed lately is the proliferation of screens in the world around me. I used to have only one . . . my television. For a while I had two, because I had a small portable in the bedroom, but that stopped working a few years ago, and I am now down to one again.

Then, I got a computer monitor. I managed to get by for a while by hooking the **Atari 800** up to the TV,*** but soon I got a separate screen for my computer. From then on, each computer I got pretty much had its own monitor. When I bought an **Atari 1040**, I couldn't use the same monitor, so I had to buy a new one, which made three screens in the apartment. Then I got a PC, and had to buy yet another monitor (which was cool with me, because I liked having three computers set up, each with a different set of games). Eventually, as I upgraded computers, I managed to limit my screen acquisition, so now I have only three monitors and one TV. And an **Atari Portfolio**, which I no longer use, but has a screen integral to it.

Lately, however, I noticed I've fallen far behind in screen count. People now have screens on their cell phones, and screens on their assorted game machines. Most of the folks at **SJ Games World HQ** carry little silver boxes the size of a new pack of gum (what happened to the old pack of gum? The one with five sticks that cost $0.05 and was about the size of a Minox camera?). Several people at **SJG** have two monitors for their computers—which they now carry with them, so they now have two or three screens with them constantly.

And people are using these screens constantly. If they aren't making phone calls, they are texting . . . people are calling and texting while walking, driving, jogging, cooking, shopping, and dozens of other verbs as well. And if they can't use their screens, they call it a dead zone (which, judging by the so-called service areas depicted in the cell phone brochures I've seen still means that nearly half the United States has no cell service. The vast majority of people born after 1989 seem to be unable to exist without at least two screens in view at all times. I guess people don't mind being isolated, but the notion of being out of communication is becoming anathema.

Nowadays, if I want to tell the kids to get off my lawn, Ill have to twitter them.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I have mentioned my fathers tech limitations before, but basically he was eventually overwhelmed by the advance of technology around him.

** I'm excluding cell phones from the list I'm going to be picking one of these up soon, as a) the prices are dropping like a stone for the basic models, and b) it is almost impossible to find a working phone booth in Austin.

*** Using something called an RF modulator which always sounded like something from a **Bugs Bunny vs Marvin the Martian** cartoon.

Mar 23, 2009, Plot Problems

For many years, people have been dreaming of a movie about **Traveller.*** Making a

movie about an RPG has some problems, not the least of which is How do you make a movie about a role-playing game? Refining the question to making a movie about the RPGs background, things don't become much easier. **Traveller** has one of the most fully developed background histories of any RPG, but this is part of the problem, not part of the solution. If you create a movie to pluck the heartstrings of people who love the **Traveller** background, you have already limited your potential market to a few hundred thousand at most . . . not a formula for blockbuster success. A successful movie has to appeal to a wider audience without losing the fans, and this requires a lot more work.

There are dozens of books on how to write screenplays. I like the approach taken by Syd Field in his various works, but there are many other good manuals. Most of them are variations on George M. Cohan's formula: In the first act, get your man up a tree. In the second act, throw rocks at him. In the third act, get him out of the tree. (also known as the *Beginning, Middle, End Formula)*. Basically, a good screenplay is a good story, and RPG adventures do not always make good stories (yeah, I know about the various classifications of role-players, one of which is storyteller but this is not the place to discuss them).

Traveller has a long history and the makings of an excellent canvas to paint a good plot on. The Third Imperium has political factions galore (the OTU has a Civil War), and more than enough wars, rebellions, invasions and such for a dozen movies. The problem is finding a story that will appeal to **Traveller** fans, SF fans in general, and a wide enough slice of the general audience to be a fiscal success. There are several of these, but the problem is that they don't really lend themselves to the 120-minute movie treatment . . . there is simply too much to cover in the way of bringing the audience up to speed. The Emperor Strephon and Duke Norris are perhaps the best developed characters in the milieu, but to do the **Fifth Frontier War** involving both characters (especially the **Warrant** plot Marc was trying to write about in his novel) takes up far too much time in useless (to the hardcore fans) exposition.

Television has more potential for **Traveller.** A TV series can take the time to develop the background while having enough action and character development to keep non-T**raveller** fans in the audience interested. There are several potential plotlines in the **Traveller** background: almost any of the **Frontier Wars** would work, the **Solomani Rim War** (especially the **Invasion of Terra**), the **Interstellar Wars**, and last (but not least) the early days of the **Third Imperium**.

The main problem is interesting a production house in licensing a property that only a few hundred thousand people have heard of. **GDW** received several offers over the years, and even signed limited contracts with one or two (we got a little earnest money from them too), but the options expired and nothing was heard from them. I'm waiting to see how the big/silver screen handles **Travellers** various aliens myself . . . that (and the royalty checks) will be very interesting.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Not the least of these dreamers are those of us who would gain fiscally from the licensing fees involved.

Apr 06, 2009, What I learned from RPGS

My first RPG was **Dungeons & Dragons*** and to the best of my recollection, I was introduced to the game by a gamer from the U of I (the Urbana campus) named Anthony Svaljenka (please forgive me, Tony, if I misspell your name after all these years!). I still have

the first copy of the rules I bought at a SF con in Chicago (the so-called "brown box" edition for you purists), from the hands of Brian Blume himself (I already knew Gary Gygax, but that's another story). After **D&D,** the staff of **GDW** began playing others: **Boot Hill** (which was called an RPG, but is really a miniatures skirmish game), **Empire of the Petal Throne,** and **Call of Cthulhu.**

Despite the fact that I was well out of my teens when I began playing, I learned several important life lessons.

D&D : Never try to kill an orc who is climbing a ladder by dropping a Molotov cocktail (flask of oil with a wick—one of the first of many improvisations **GDW**'s staff wrought on the rules) from the top when another member of your party is standing at the base. The Molotov hit the orc, burst, and dribbled burning oil on our comrade, killing him as well. This was the first incident of fratricide in my gaming experience, but it would not be the last.

Boot Hill: Never try create a diversion by setting off a dynamite blast in the lumber yard on the other side of town when the referee has seen Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and you have not.**

All: Observing people's playing styles will give you a pretty good clue about their basic psychological makeup—and make you really glad that most folks behave according to a more civilized code of conduct in real life than they do while playing games. Also, it will deepen your resolve that most people can't stick to a plan to save their (vicarious) lives.

Boot Hill: Never agree to play the sheriff in a cowtown on payday. TV westerns do not prepare you for the chicanery that a group of creative people can inflict in the name of good clean fun.

All: I learned that I have a very strong tendency to stick with the first plan I come up with, and that this is not always the best idea. Improvisation under pressure is a talent few people have, and one that many more could use.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* People who are fooled by my youthful appearance often ask what RPGs I played in college. I did not play RPGs in college, because I graduated from college before RPGs were invented! **Dungeons & Dragons*** came out in 1974, by which time I had given up on graduate school and joined the staff of **GDW** (which was not yet **Game Designers' Workshop, Inc.**)

** The conversation went something like this:

GM (John Hill): So, Gettysburg, how much dynamite did you use?
Civil War Veteran "Gettysburg" Grant (Loren Wiseman): Uh . . .
GM: OK, roll three dice . . .
"Gettysburg": (rattle, rattle) 13.

If you have seen the movie, you know why the referee scattered small lengths of balsa wood all over the game board for the next three turns (among other things)—and you also have a clue why he did not allow anyone to communicate by voice for the rest of the game "All you can hear is a ringing sound . . . a very loud ringing sound."

Apr 20, 2009, Why I'm Such a Poor GM

My first stint as a dungeonmaster was shortly after the **GDW** staff discovered **Dungeons & Dragons*** (mentioned in the last issue), and we all sacrificed many packets of graph paper creating underground (or sometimes aboveground) labyrinths for our characters to wander in, kill things, and loot the corpses. At that time, **GDW** sold pads of hex

paper (with a grid of 1/4" hexagons) for use by board gamers in planning and designing game boards.* We soon discovered the pleasures of adventuring outside the labyrinth/tunnel/catacombs/sewers/dungeon/maze and soon each member of the staff had a "world" and took turns DMing.

I soon learned I sucked at DM/GM/refereeing and eventually was able to determine why.

I am no good at thinking "on my feet." I have trouble improvising when the adventure goes away from the two or three alternatives I planned for, and tend to get awfully predictable after a few sessions. I like making maps. I really, really like making maps. My first "world" took up a single 8-1/2" x 11" page where 1/4" was twenty miles, which I considered to be pretty penny-ante as worlds went. My second world was planned to about the size of Earth, but only 45% water . . . I still have the two 3-ring binders with the master maps, the sixty or so maps I actually finished, and my partial notes for the half a continent I actually got sketched out before everyone lost interest in the campaign. I had a pair of major empires (roughly inspired by Rome and China about the first century AD (which should come as no surprise to those who know my interests), separated by an extensive wilderness with several smaller polities and a huge number of barbarian tribes (some of them non-human). I started by mapping the major cities, and I think I actually managed to finish the capital of my "Rome" before the whole thing went belly up, including the sewers under the forum and the secret passages from the principal temple to the imperial palace.

Let me modify that first sentence above: I like *starting* to make maps. Like a lot of other things, I tend to bite off more than I can chew. I tend to get bogged down in unimportant details that keep me from other, more important aspects of the project.

I have a strong tendency to go with the first idea that comes into my head as far as plot elements go, and I am very reluctant to abandon it. This has caused me many headaches in the past until I realized what was going on, and I still have to fight the tendency.

I take solace in the fact that some of the things that make me a poor GM/DM/Referee/Tin Deity actually make me pretty good at writing RPG books. I think it is partly because I learned where things can go wrong for the GM.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Actually, we found the pads handy for preliminary design of game maps and found they were cheaper to buy in quantity, so we ordered a bunch and added them to our product line.

May 04, 2009, On-Line Resources and Traveller

Over the years I have run across a few websites I return to again and again, mostly to research some aspect of **Traveller** or other. Here are a few I find most useful and/or entertaining.:

Google: First and foremost, **Google** is the search engine I use most. It takes a knack I have not yet acquired to use it efficiently, however, and others may prefer some other engine.

Wikipedia: Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia that allows users to modify it . . . this is as good and as bad as it sounds. It is a useful place to start for researching a general topic, but for specifics or controversies, you need to know quite a bit about the subject you are researching in order to separate the, shall we say, wheat from the chaff.

CIA World Factbook: The **CIA** makes some of the best maps in the world, and you

can find their atlases for sale in many places. **The CIA World Factbook** has certain basic data about every country on Earth, organized and fact-checked as well as a public domain publication of an intelligence arm of the US government can be. The interesting thing for **Traveller** fans is that the figures (like public literacy, military-age males, or GDP) can be cribbed and used as the basis for fabricating worlds/nations/etc.

Online Newspapers: Online newspapers, such as this example about grass growing in the Antarctic serve as sources for writing about worlds, in this case a very cold world. I was concerned about plant life being able to thrive there, and this provided me with useful information.

Olduvai George: This is a website of a nature artist ("Olduvai George") and is a good source of strange looking animals that can act as inspiration for your alien critters.

These last three are not quite in the same class as the others, but I find them useful in a number of ways:

The Straight Dope: Where else can you get answers for questions you were afraid to ask? I particularly enjoy their motto: "*Fighting Ignorance Since 1973 – It's Taking Longer Than We Thought.*"

Snopes: This is a great site if you are looking for oddball news, but it is an excellent source of "urban legends" and their associated facts.

Wordplay: This last one is a little out of date, but the archives are a great resource for advice about almost every aspect of screenwriting. It hasn't helped me finish one yet, but I made more progress taking their advice than anyone else.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 18, 2009, Assorted Whathaveyou

A number of bits of interesting ephemera from the history of **GDW** and me:

GDWs first gaming convention was a small, one-day show put on by Greg Novak, who later went on to design several games for **GDW**. It was held in a school gym (Greg was a school teacher at the time), and I remember almost nothing about it except that I had a wonderful time pushing lead and ran across a short story predominantly featuring the famed SF trilogy **Crustacean, Crustacean and Umpire, and Second Crustacean,** where a highly prolific Asimov-like SF writer is discovered to achieve his productivity by cloning himself. I'm pretty sure it wasn't titled **Send in the Clones** (**GDW**s booth sat next to a local used book dealer who had a large collection of SF magazines for sale). Our booth consisted of a card table and a couple of folding chairs, and we sold a game or two . . . basically enough to cover our gas for the half-hour drive. I don't know how the book-dealer made out I don't think it was his day-job.

After I got out of high school, my science education consisted largely of reading Isaac Asimov's collections of science essays (such as **Science, Numbers, and I**), a chemistry class,[*] and a large number of biology courses (for my minor). I found my reading to be more useful to game designing than the majority of the coursework, although the comparative vertebrate anatomy and paleontology classes were of considerable use in creating alien lifeforms.

I met the group that was to become **GDW** about 7:00 PM one night in the student lounge of ISU (see footnote), where I had gone in response to a poster I saw advertising the formation of a student gaming club. I met Marc Miller, Frank Chadwick, Rich Banner, John Harshman (who were to become employees of **GDW**) and several other people, some of them still long-time friends. I played John Harshman at **Panzerblitz**, and got soundly

trounced.

As I related in an earlier essay, **GDW**s earliest days were in the apartment shared by Frank and Marc. The art department was run by Rich Banner out of his house—the design offices, warehouse, assembly, and shipping end of the operation were in the apartment. At the time, I rented a room in a private home, and often spent the night on the couch, leading the two students who shared lodgings with me to believe I was shacking up some place. They did not believe that I was packing, addressing and mailing games.

GDWs first computer (well, the first computer to enter the office) was owned by Rich Banner, and I do not now remember the brand I want to say **Corona**, but that may not be right. The first one **GDW** bought was a **TRS-80** with a cassette drive to record programs. Marc soon dominated the little thing's time, and we ended up buying an Apple II just to let the rest of us have some game time. The most interesting result of all this was the formal letter from Frank (as president of **GDW**) instructing each member of the staff to buy a computer and become familiar with it, so we could begin designing computer games. This letter allowed me to deduct half the price of my first computer as a business expense, which I found rather satisfying (as it was my first deduction, and my first and only audit so far).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* It was rather an unusual experience. The university I attended (**Illinois State University**) had an arrangement with a local nursing school to provide basic science courses. As a freshman, I signed up (quite by accident) in the 9:00 AM lecture hall for the beginning chemistry course that 250 student nurses were bulk-enrolled in. I showed for the first lecture, and found I was one of four people in the room (one of them the professor) not wearing white, and one of a half-dozen or so males. There were benefits to this arrangement that I was a bit slow to take advantage of, but I was a bit dense in those days.

Jun 09, 2009, Z-Z-Z-APPED!

The gentle readers may have noticed that the June 2nd issue of **JTAS** is missing most (well, all) of its content. There's a long and painful story that goes with this.

Basically, the elements (in the form of a thunderstorm) decided to assassinate my computer. A lightning strike took out the phones in my apartment complex (my own included, but that's another tale of woe) and tripped the circuit breaker on my surge protector, but not before enough current had blasted through to take out my motherboard (which gave it's life so that the $4.00 fuses could live). The repair tech showed me the motherboard, with smoke trails and little melted bits clearly visible. As if that weren't bad enough, the jolt also seems to have come up the phone line, because the modem was seriously damaged also (not to mention the fact that I lost phone service for 8 hours or so).

Alert readers will also notice that there are only two articles in this issue. Here's my plan for the future, to make up for the article shortfall necessitated by the lightning storm: The next four issues will have four articles instead of three, one additional article each issue. I will write those additional articles, and hopefully this will make up for the shortage caused by my computer getting zapped.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 29, 2009, Two Cultures Redux

Back in 2005, I mentioned C. P. Snow's notion that society is split between two cultures—the arts and humanities on one side and the sciences on the other. I wrote that Snow's arguments are still valid today, and talked about how American society is increasingly split into rich/poor and tech savvy/tech ignorant segments. I'm becoming convinced that this is too simplistic, however, and that American society* is splitting into several groups (albeit with some overlap).

Snow's arts/sciences dichotomy can still be seen, but there seems to be an increasing segment of society that is woefully ignorant of both, and a good many of them seem to take a perverse pride in that fact. Shallowness seems to have become a virtue to a good many people, and no one is willing to make an effort to learn anything if it involves more than 30 seconds on **Google**.

I ran into many examples of this while working part-time as a sales associate in a nation bookstore chain. Students would come to me with a list of required summer reading, and select the thinnest of the options available one young woman asked which was the smallest of three Mark Twain titles, and then confessed that her question made her seem very shallow. She was the only customer I encountered who even seemed to recognize the fact: most simply wanted to get through the course (whatever it was) with as little effort as possible, and retain as little information as possible.

I did occasionally have small victories. In one case, I encountered a 12-year-old student who told me she needed one more book to accompany the copy of **Moby Dick** she was buying, and that it had to be a history book. She had the further requirement that it not be boring. I suggested she try a book based on the real-life inspiration for **Moby Dick**: **In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex.** Her interest was not piqued, however, until I told her that the ship was rammed and sunk by a whale, and that the survivors spent several months in small boats and ended up eating each other. Like zombies? she asked, and went away with two books, marveling that history had something interesting after all.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I can't discuss other societies, as I am not familiar enough with them to do so.

Jul 13, 2009, "It Was Raining On the Planet Mongo . . ."

As we were leaving the movie **The Empire Strikes Back**, **GDW**s president and chief designer Frank Chadwick remarked that the **Star Wars** universe seemed to be entirely filled by monotone planets. Tatooine, the desert planet, Hoth, the ice planet . . . practically every world we saw was uniform.* We went back to the office and a discussion of what was right and proper in the creation of realistic fictional worlds followed, with Frank summing up the wrong approach with a quote he remembered from some **Flash Gordon** comic strip he had read when he was young: "**It Was Raining On the Planet Mongo . . .**" Realistic worlds, Frank opined, should have at least a little variety. How can it possibly be raining everywhere on a world at once?** How can a world consist of nothing but sand dunes and arroyos? Or glaciers?

Many years ago, before the invention of such programs as **Fractal Terrains**, I used to try to design realistic worlds by drawing continents on pieces of graph paper and trying to devise a sort of "worldbuilding game" that would enable tectonic movement of continental plates for the creation of mountain ranges and abyssal depths. I never got anything that

worked to my satisfaction, I'm sad to say (and before anyone asks, no, I didn't keep any of my notes).

In a similar vein, I have recently been looking at a realistic (well, reasonably realistic) approach to the ice planet—a world in the midst of an ice age, where rising sea levels have taken out most of the land surface that isn't covered with sheets of ice, tundra, or mountains. There are probably a few places where the climate is still quite comfortable (and not just for people who grew up in Duluth, Minnesota), and I think it would be interesting to explore how the massive climate shifts of a more extensive ice age then Earth ever saw would play out.

First of all, there will probably be massive die-offs of the animal and plant species as those that can't adapt to the spreading glaciers meet their fate (Im assuming this happened millennia in the past and things stabilized long before there was any human settlement). If the glaciation lasts long enough, new species will arise, better adapted to a life a very cold desert or very competitive in the little temperate space that remains. This does not mean a sparsely populated ecosystem . . . Earth's polar regions and the surrounding tundra areas have a large variety of species well-adapted to living there . . . there are even species of grass and other plants to be found in Antarctica (although not in the middle of the continent in the dead of winter).

Secondly, I doubt people are rushing to colonize the place, although in the 3rd Imperium there are probably a fairly large group of people who are there to study the place, and a smaller number of people who supply their needs. Perhaps there are a few herders and farmers who specialize in tundra crops for local consumption by the scientists counting penguinoid eggs.

All of this is being pursued as a back burner project, but I've been revisiting some old project ideas lately, and this one may revive. Let me know if you are interested in a GT: **Iceworld** book. :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Later movies reinforced this impression: **Endor**, the forest world, although movies I through III did a little better Naboo had several different types of terrain, it would seem.
** later during the conversation I brought up the fact that it was always raining somewhere on Earth but that I knew what he meant.

Jul 27, 2009, Alternates

Over the years, there are a number of "*roads not taken*" in **Traveller.** I think that most of them were simply cast aside because we at **GDW** did not have the time or resources to follow all of them up, but some of them were decidedly inferior to what we actually did.

Ine Givar: The most famous of the **Traveller** alternatives is the organization known as the Ine Givar. This group was originally intended to be an anti-imperial rebel group, and our original intention was for most characters to be working with or for it against the evil empire. This was a direct inspiration from **Star Wars**, and we were not alone **SPI's Freedom in the Galaxy** SF RPG took a similar approach. Before much could be published, however, Marc and Frank changed their minds, and decided to make the empire—our Third Imperium the good guys, and began referring to the Ine Givar as a terrorist organization, in the pay of the Zhodani.

Hivers: Marc's original notes for the Hivers were that they were to be a hive mind (where their were no individuals, only a single unified consciousness), and their body form

was to be that of a large, ostrich-like flightless bird. As is usual in any endeavor of this kind, people change their minds, and Marc liked what Bill Keith, John Harshman, and your humble editor came up with vastly better than his original notion.

Multiple RPGs Tied to TL: After **Traveller** was published, and the first two supplements had been written, Marc came up with the notion that **GDW** should publish an RPG for each **TL** . . . **Traveller** would be the **TL 12-15 RPG,** and we would do a game at **TL 4** for **Western Gunfight/Colonial Skirmish Gaming**, one at **TL 7-8** for espionage roleplaying, and so on. They would use the same basic mechanics and be interchangeable. This idea was not completely abandoned . . . **GDW** did eventually do other RPGs . . . it was just that it seemed like a much better use of our resources to write and publish as many **Traveller** products as possible.

Alternate FTL Drives: Years later, after **Traveller** had sold its 1,000,000th product,* **GDW** began serious consideration of other RPGs . . . we had become convinced that other RPGs would not cannibalize **Traveller** sales, and customers had been asking for other backgrounds. One idea (which would eventually see print as **Fire, Fusion, and Steel**) was to create alternative means of interstellar travel (and FTL communications) and tie different technological development levels to them. We considered a number of ideas (and some of them eventually saw print as **Traveller: 2300/2300 AD**.

The Lucky Ones: This was the working name for an "**After the Holocaust**" game that would have taken place a generation or two after a massive plague that ended civilization. One character type was the "book," which was a person who had memorized a manual for the operation of a complex piece of machinery, in the hopes that the real thing would be encountered someday. Some of the research for this saw the light of day in **Twilight: 2000.**

Team Omega: This was the working name for a game that involved a small, elite group of people who located and destroyed monsters, vampires, werewolves, aliens, and so on. Some of the ideas for this one were eventually incorporated into **Dark Conspiracy.** Later, it was assigned as the working name of GDWs time travel game, which never saw print.

Sun and Crescent: This was the working name for a game in which the characters were two opposing groups of wizards/sorcerers/witches/shamans, each represented by a symbol. Nothing much ever came of this idea, although we would have preceded **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** by about 5 years.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

*That is, when the combined print runs exceeded 1,000,000 copies according to Marc's reckoning.

Aug 10, 2009, Law and Aliens

The legal status of aliens (non-human intelligences) is not in much doubt in the **Traveller** Third Imperium. Well, to the extent we've discussed it in print,* anyway. Their status on present day Earth is more of a problem, however. Since we've never had one show up,** the question of their precise status remains a matter for speculation and discussion.

From time to time, people have discussed the legal status of ETs in print and on-line (here, for example). . . it is a topic that continues to the present, and (to the best of the authors knowledge) has never inspired any legislator to propose legal status for extraterrestrial intelligences. Nevertheless, the question of whether the first ET ambassador should be greeted by the **Secretary of State** or a representative of the **Fish and Wildlife Service** is still valid.

In the situation presented in **GURPS Traveller: The Interstellar Wars**, however, the first aliens we contact are human (the Vilani and others), removed from Earth hundreds of millennia in the past. What, exactly, is their legal status, since they have no terrestrial nationality? The most common suggestion and the first thing that occurs to me is that the Vilani's legal status is the same as that of people who have declared themselves stateless, although this term is normally applied to people whose nation of birth has ceased to exist or whose citizenship has been repudiated or voluntarily renounced (the missionaries in the movie **The Sand Pebbles** attempt this in order to foil a U.S. Naval shore party's attempt to remove them against their will). In order for there to be a formal status of extraterrestrial humans, their government has to be formally recognized by a government. A further complication, it seems to me, is that even if one or more nations do recognize the Vilani and allow them to send embassies and diplomatic personnel, their status will not necessarily apply in any other nation.

It seems to me that this could take decades to sort out, and can provide the basis for a number of amusing adventure situations.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Which we haven't done, really. Non-humans are citizens of the Imperium and the world they were born on just like humans at least that's the assumption we at **GDW** made while we were working on the game. I don't believe its ever stated in print in so many words.

** I'm one of those folks who believe we have not yet been contacted by extraterrestrial intelligences . . . you may find that strange for a person who earns his living by writing for SF RPGs, but it is quite common. I think it will be the greatest event in history when and if it happens, but I don't think it has happened yet.

Aug 24, 2009, Monsters?

One of the first things Marc decided about **Traveller** was the notion that there would be no* monsters. He didn't really have a strict definition of monster, but it transpired that what he wanted was for **Traveller** to have animals that made sense in relation to their environment. Marc (and John Harshman, who, with Frank Chadwick, designed the animal creation and encounter system) wanted the characters to encounter animals that fitted into an ecosystem rather than simply siting around waiting to ambush wanderers. The general idea is explained in Paul Colinvaux's **Why Big Fierce Animals Are Rare: An Ecologist's Perspective.** In later years, we would define a monster by making reference to the movie **Alien**.

Alien is, we felt, not really a science fiction movie, but more of a haunted house/horror movie set on an interstellar spaceship. The alien creature that pursues the crew of the **Starship Nostromo** doesn't really make a lot of sense** from a biological standpoint –– it is a monster.

The critters encountered in **Traveller** are interesting in some way or another . . . they may be dangerous, but they are not necessarily large, ravening beasts, sitting for decades behind a door, waiting to ambush/eat wandering adventurers. This, we felt, was one of the least attractive aspects of other RPGs. We wanted everything to make sense from an ecological standpoint, and leave the occasional mysterious aberrations for implementation at the GM's option.

None of this prevented **GDW** from loving the sequel, **Aliens**—as demonstrated by our incorporating the Colonial Marines into our game **2300 AD**.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Or very, very few, anyway.

** Okay, later films in the franchise and a highly vocal fandom have created several background explanations to account for the creature's various characteristics, but none of these really hang together, at least in my opinion.

Sep 07, 2009, Sports?

Many years ago, I read an article in **National Geographic Magazine** that brought home to me that things had undergone a vast change. One of the standard articles in **National Geographic**'s of years past was the "**Lone Traveler Against the Wild**" article, where an intrepid adventurer would set out across some trackless wilderness (taking copious photographs along the way) and publishing a diary of the journey afterwards. From the earliest days of the magazine until late into the 20th century, these articles could be counted on for thrilling tales of struggle and travail against the forces of nature, from which the author eventually emerged—somewhat the worse for wear, perhaps—but having risked death or serious injury. They could also be counted on for lots of really cool pictures, which was a the point of the exercise, after all.

The article I remember was a woman who proposed to cross Australia with a pair of pack camels, like the early explorers. She took several cameras, and a satellite phone, with which she would broadcast regular updates. When the only camel that was trained to ride suffered an injury she called for a vet, who flew in by plane, treated the camel, and brought her extra supplies so she could wait until it healed. Somehow, this is less epic than the story of **Captain Bligh and the Bounty Survivors** or **Earnest Shackleton**.

It is a general principle that what starts as a risky, highly adventurous activity eventually becomes a sport, and sooner or later ends up mundane. John Wesley Powell explored the Colorado River in 1869 using wooden boats . . . octogenarians run these same rapids today in rubber boats. Throughout the 19th century climbing mountains was the ultimate in high* adventure – it is done by paraplegics nowadays (although it is still pretty rugged). Jumping out of an intact airplane used to be a (rather risky) way of delivering troops to the battlefield, and now it is a sport as well (I know a gentleman who celebrated his 80th birthday by jumping . . . admittedly, he is ex-US Army Special Forces, but still . . .). People even strap boards to their feet and slide down snow-covered mountain slopes . . .

Anyway, **Traveller** has a couple of risky sports ("skydiving" from Near-Earth Orbit using a foamed ablative re-entry kit comes to mind) of its own. I'm more than a little curious what the future will really bring in the way of new sports. Frankly, I'm not going to do any of those either.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Pun unintentional, but it happened anyway. Those are the best kind.

Sep 21, 2009, Food and Drink in Traveller

One of the requirements of science fiction, it seems, is the necessity to come up with exotic, alien foodstuffs and beverages. Some feel these add to the "*not in Kansas anymore*" feeling, others think this is done because there's something too mundane about characters

eating/drinking something too familiar. **Star Trek** has saurian brandy, quadrotriticale, and various Klingon dishes, among others. I recall a SF novel in which a carnivorous alien potentate was served live rodents force-fed with syrup (the title escapes me, and I don't think it was very good anyway). In movies, the prop department is often called upon to create unusual dishes, either by sculpting them out of existing (edible) dishes, or locating nonstandard fruits/vegetables/roast beasts. The mentions are sometimes a vital plot element (quadrotriticale) and sometimes just a throwaway bit (saurian brandy).

Over the years, **Traveller**'s writers have invented various exotic forms of edibles and potables:

Scout Brew: This one seems to have arisen from fan legend, and was then written up by the Digest Group in various places. It is allegedly incredibly potent, and kind of a rite of passage for the IISS, but few details can be agreed upon.

Vilani Beer: This is another item that "just growed" from the background, and was added to a little bit at a time. It was born out of a consideration of the rest of Vilani cuisine, and the importance of food preparation in Vilani culture. I wrote my version of it in basic book, as a vignette to establish the "*not in Kansas*" background.

Zilan Eiswein: This vintage is from grapes grown on the planet Zila, and form a minor part of the plot in an adventure. Eiswein is a genuine type of German white wine, which can be found in numerous vintages on the internet.

Groat Cheese: This arose from fan jokes using the **JTAS** Bestiary feature about a critter called the groat, making a pun with the word "goat" and using a genuine terrestrial foodstuff—goat cheese.*

Bushrunner: This is another entry from a **JTAS** Bestiary entry. The meat of the bushrunner is blue, and slightly toxic, so it is used as a garnish for other dishes (just don't eat too much).

Tokay: Actually, this one is genuine, as I describe elsewhere.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Goat cheese has a reputation for having an obnoxious smell (and some versions do) but I've had varieties of it that are quite tasty and not malodorous at all.

Oct 05, 2009, Analogies and Refereeing

While I readily admit that I am the world's worst GM, people often write me for hints on how to do it better. I have watched enough good GMs in my day to learn a few tips I feel confident in passing on. Most of these operate under the assumption that the best way to explain SF situations is to create an analogous situation that the players will be more familiar with.

Starports: I always used to explain starports using the analogies of an airport/seaport. Starships fly, so the similarities with an airport are pretty apt. Starships are also much larger than aircraft, so starports also have similarities with seaports.

A common situation is the adventurers overuse of some cool artifact. Characters manage to lay hands on one or more sets of Marine battledress, for example, and never take it off. The referee must then either create situations that challenge the group (which tend to involve lots of firepower) or arrange to have the battledress damaged/destroyed/confiscated. All of these situations tend to anger the group, and frankly, the best thing to do is not let them have the thingie in the first place. A good analogy will help explain why fate has to remove the goodies, or at least persuade the adventurers not to use them so often. Players

who wear battledress into a starport are analogous to people who show up at an airport in full combat gear: helmet, body armor, combat boots, etc. Someone in an outfit like this is likely to attract the attention of the authorities, and trouble is sure to ensue. It is up to the referee to see that this does not end in the group acquiring several more sets of (slightly singed) battledress. One of the first things that occurs to players of a certain mindset is to perpetrate a caper against a rich-but-evil-nobleman or large-but-incredibly-corrupt corporation.* These things are not as simple as most players seem to think, so the drawbacks are best explained by analogy with a similar caper carried out today, involving a real life corporation/billionaire. Every adventuring group seems to acquire weaponry for their starship (just as every adventuring group seems to acquire a starship). In the 18th and 19th century, a great many merchant ships were armed (although not as well as military vessels of similar tonnage). Adventuring groups in **Traveller** often try using their ships weaponry in (sometimes) hare-brained schemes to extort money out of locals. Imagining how a good-sized 18th century seaport would have dealt with an analogous situation can help a GM cope with the situation realistically.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* A good model for this type of adventure can be found in the **Ariel** episode from the TV series **Firefly.**

Oct 19, 2009, What Is The Color Of Jumpspace?

The title of this article is also the title of what is (as far as I know) the only filksong* composed in my honor. The link explains the background of the song, but the subject is a legend in the **Traveller** community.

In the early days of **Traveller**, the **GDW** staff attended a convention (I forget if it was a gaming convention or an SF one), but the point of the story is that I had just returned to my room after an evening of partying . . . I think it was about 3:00 A.M. but I am not certain. I had just settled into bed and was nodding off when the phone rang. It was a fan (I don't know if he was a player or a GM, but it doesn't matter) who was in the middle of a game, judging from the background noise. One of the players wanted to know what color jumpspace was, and all concerned thought it would be a good idea to ask one of the creators . . . how they got my room number I don't know. I was pretty groggy and more than a little tired and just a bit grumpy. I answered the question with a number of obscenities and hung up. To this day, I don't know who it was.

Anyway, this experience left me with a tendency to dislike people who asked the question—and it (or variations on the theme) seems to come up a lot. My answer has changed from Jamb your thumbs into your eye sockets . . . that's what it looks like. To words to the effect We leave this up to the individual referee to decide.

There are several versions of "What does jumpspace officially look like?" We didn't give a lot of thought to it initially, but it soon dawned on several of us that there was adventure potential in the concept, and Frank wrote up a sequence of **TNS** newsbriefs for the old print **JTAS** about a man who survived direct contact with jumpspace. He did not, however, flesh out the idea any further, and (like a lot of other **TNS** notes) left the plotline behind. Later writers ran across the newsbriefs and ran with them. Later writers (I forget who) went so far as to create a reporter pursuing the investigation (Jeffrey Long) and wrote a few more teasing reports.

As for the actual appearance of jumpspace, Marc eventually came up with a few ideas,

the **Digest Group** came up with a slightly different version for their **Operators Manual Books** (a proposed series that ended after the first installment). **Traveller** fans seem to fall into three groups:

Those who want an official version.
Those who make up their own version.
Those who don't care.

Those of the first group, upon closer examination, seem to be those who either feel that our ideas are better than theirs could ever be, or those who believe that **GDW** worked out thousands of pages of background which we have kept back from the world for some reason. While there are secrets about some of the future of the 3rd Imperium, there are none concerning jumpspace . . . Except for that Jeffrey Long thing. But you'll have to wait to hear how that comes out. :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* If there are any more out there, Id like to know about them.

Nov 02, 2009, Building Things . . . Part II

My previous essay on this subject was rather well-received, so I know that a number of **Traveller** fans share my enthusiasm. I felt I should share a few tips that I have learned in the last few years (the links there are still useful).

Working on several projects using the **Hirst Arts Roman Temple Mold**, I soon learned that it was vital that the mold be placed on a smooth, absolutely level surface. If there is any curvature, the final product will also be curved, and will not fit together properly. I found that the best casting material are the various types of anhydrous gypsum plasters and cements,* which tend to be a little on the heavy side. I use the molds for the various cool detail bits and build the walls and such from lighter materials, such as foamboard (from the art store or office supply store . . . the latter sells it for science project presentations) or insulation board from the local home center (half-inch thick and blue or pink in color you pretty much have to buy it in 4x8 sheets, however).

Hirst Arts now has a number of SF accessory molds, (this one, for example). And the **HA** website has a lot of good advice on using them to make nice-looking projects. Once again, I suggest that you use something lighter for floors and walls, and save the heavier stuff for the detail bits.

It is good practice to do trial assemblies to make sure things fit together properly. Planning ahead has saved me a lot of wasted effort over the years.

I've done some work with casting resin in the last few years (I cast some of the resin parts for the **Combine Laser Towers** offered on **W23**. The resin is lighter than the **Hydrocal,** but about 10 times more expensive, and a little fussier to work with. Right now, I experimenting with resin products made by the **Smooth-On Company**. The particular variety I have chosen pours like water, and mostly eliminates one of the major headaches in casting: air bubbles.

Books on model railroad structures are also available, and are pretty useful for ideas, if not actual plans. Hmmmm . . . I wonder what a HO scale Martian railroad would look like. I think I've seen a kit for a monorail on-line.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I prefer **Hydrocal** (a product of U.S. Gypsum) but there are several other types. I buy mine 50 pounds at a time from a local ceramics supplier in Austin, and repackage it into smaller airtight resealable bags to prevent it from absorbing moisture from the air and turning into a solid block.

Nov 16, 2009, Questions and Answers

When I am a guest at an SF or gaming convention, I "*sing for my supper*" by various means. I serve on panels during panel discussions, I help out at charity auctions, and the like, but mostly I preside over Q&A sessions where people ask me questions and are entertained by my answers. These questions concentrate mostly on Traveller and other games I have designed, developed, or worked on during my years in the business. The same sort of questions turn up, time after time, but there are always a few new ones.

Today, I thought I'd deal with a few of the ones that have never turned up:

Why is it spelled **Traveller** with *two ells*?: Believe it or not, nobody has aver asked me this one at a convention. It comes up from time to time on mailing list FAQs and such, but never at a convention. Basically, Marc felt it added a touch of class to use two ells (the British English spelling*) instead of one (the conventional American English spelling). I forget who pointed it out first, but it was noted that the unusual spelling would make it better for trademark purposes. The last is most often given as the reason on the internet, but the first is the primary reason Marc advanced.

Why is the **LBB** cover black?: Believe it or not, this one has never come up at a convention either. There were several reasons, but the primary one was that the project didn't have much of a budget, and there wasn't enough money available to pay for an illustration that would do the game justice. We could have found some typical cheesy second/third/fourth rights SF illustration, but we decided to go with the (now famous) graphic treatment instead. We discovered almost immediately that this cover treatment established the **Traveller** "brand" and made it stand out from everything else on the bookshelf. When we decided to go to the larger format books rather than the digest-sized ones, the market had changed and we felt that we needed to use Bill Keith's excellent paintings for the covers (I often think that one of my major contributions to the game was hiring Bill as an illustrator/writer and his brother Andrew as a writer).

When Did the Idea of Supplements Come Up?: Initially, **GDW** didn't plan on doing other books for **Traveller,** but Marc noticed that **D&D** was achieving success with supplementary books at the same time Frank decided he wanted to write a book dealing specifically with military actions to flesh out a few things he felt weren't covered adequately in the first three **LBB**s. Marc thought about the matter for a while, and then came up with the concept of **Adventures, Double Adventures, Books, Supplements,** and a color-coding system to appeal to the collector (aka, "*IT MUST BE MINE!*") instinct in many gamers. This proved to be a brilliant inspiration.

There are a few million other questions I haven't been asked, but since most of them are things like "What is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?" they are irrelevant to **Traveller.**

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For you ACW** buffs, it's also the spelling of the name of Robert E Lee's primary horse. He had a mare named Miss Lucy as well (IIRC), but that would make a very poor name for a science fiction RPG.

** American Civil War—the abbreviation used by wargamers to prevent confusion with the English/Spanish/Russian Civil Wars.

Nov 30, 2009, GM's Hints from the World's Worst GM

Although it is widely known that I am the worlds worst GM,* I have gamed from time to time with some of the worlds best, and I have a few things I observed over the years with regard to SF games especially, but which I think have a general applicability to other genres as well.

Depart From The Rules: Frank Chadwick (who is one of the best GMs on the planet, and also one of the finest game designers extant) considered the rules his guidelines, and often did not tell players what numbers they needed to roll or even how close they had come to success or failure. This can be kind of annoying for certain personality types (especially the I've rolled all the 1s out of these dice types) but in the right hands it can make for a very pleasing gaming experience. Without obsessing on the mechanics of the game, the players can get more into character and focus on having a good time than trying to min-max the situation.

Not In Kansas Any More: Over the years, I have accumulated a number of little surprises to throw at the players as a means of slowing them down. One of my favorite little tidbits was when I learned that among other things, some Mongols believe it is bad luck to travel anywhere on Tuesday (this came up when I read about some archeologist in the 1920s who ran into trouble getting herders for his pack animals to leave on his schedule). A discussion with a native American many years ago brought up several superstitions still prevalent today one of which was that certain animals are good luck on some days and bad luck on some days, and neutral most of the time. A person of a certain clan born on a certain day would consider it an appallingly bad omen to see an owl as he began his journey.** Imagine a group who has hired a band of locals to help out in a mercenary ticket being told that the offensive cannot start today because a groat had been heard during the night?

Be Ready to Wing It: The best GMs have a general plan for the adventure, and are prepared for the players to go off on a tangent. It is not the easiest thing in the world to be able to anticipate what the players are going to have their characters do, but if you know the personalities involved (and playing RPGs is, in my opinion, one of the best ways to learn about a person) it is fairly easy to lay out several divergent pathways for them to follow. One of the characteristics of Marc Miller's referring style was that one never felt railroaded, but still ended up where he wanted you to end up.

Don't Be Too Generous: One of the things that will cause problems for the GM in the long run is a too generous distribution of the loot. In **Traveller** this usually means letting the adventurers get their hands on too much hardware (who hasn't run into the group with a dozen FGMP-14s and battledress to match?), but it can also mean giving the group too much information too cheaply. One trip to a starport bar and a few credits distributed around should not get you the blueprints for the **SuSAG** installation **Ling Standard** has hired you to break into. Learning what they need to know should be an adventure in itself, preferably several.

I hope these serve to inspire the readers to greater efforts.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I make no secret of it, which is one reason why it is widely known ... otherwise, it would only be known to those who have witnessed me run an RPG adventure.

** I had an interesting experience when I started my journey to Gen-Con UK a year or so ago . . . as I left my apartment, I found a bat lying on the concrete by my apartment door. I don't know if bats are good omens or bad, but I do know that bats lying on the ground in the daytime and making only feeble attempts to flee are incredibly bad things to touch. Fortunately I didn't let the experience dishearten me on my journey. Based on the great time I had as a GoH in Reading, perhaps dying bats are a good omen for me. I'm not anxious to test this out, however.

Dec 14, 2009, Too Much Information

By the title of this piece, I mean to deal with players who demand to know every piece of information relevant to the adventure, and most of the rest of it.*

The problem with **Traveller**—indeed the problem with most SF RPGs is that too many players were raised with computers, the internet, and (nowadays) WiFi and hand-held gadgets. Twenty-five years ago, players wanted to be able to use the library program on the ships computer to find out everything they wanted to know to help with their adventure: complete biographies of every bad guy, floorplans or every building in town, phone records, bank records, and on and on ad infinitum. The worst part of all this was that the GM had to come up with it, either creating it in advance (which was a major hassle) or making it up on the fly (which means that it is likely to contain inconsistencies which players are certain to leap on with both feet.

If anything, it has gotten worse over the years what players used to expect to get from the ships computer they now expect to be available to them in an instant from the cell phone/PDA/gadget in their pocket. They expect to be able to talk to anyone on the planet instantly, to find any address and how to get there in an instant, and for this to work perfectly on every world they go to.

And why not?

One of **Traveller's** guiding principles has been to model the future on the present. Having the communicator in everyones pocket work like whatever the hot new gadget is this week is not something the GM should avoid . . . it merely means the GM needs to get a little creative in order to retain control of the data flow.

First, the hi-tech bells and whistles gadgetry will work perfectly well . . . in the starport and probably the startown (although there may be a fee). You can find a street address with perfect accuracy . . . most of the time. Anyone who has used a GPS system connected with a map program knows that there are occasional glitches—being instructed to make a left turn onto a non-existent entrance ramp is one of the most common. And if you are looking for an address in Atlanta, Georgia, and all you know is that its something-something Peachtree Street/Boulevard/Road/*Strasse*/Common/Place/etc.—good luck.

If the particular world you're on uses a postal address system like that used by Japan, good luck finding the house across from a given address without considerable work. If your startown is divided into postal districts, and house numbers are issued in the order the building was erected, you'll need to take careful notes. Number 4141, Rural route 12 is another possibility that can lead to nightmares if you don't remember if it was 4141 or 1441.

Another possibility is that the information available is incorrect. Back in the good old days of hardcopy atlases, printing companies used to include false information in order to make sure any competitors were at least doing their own research instead of copying the product.

One of **Traveller's** greatest fans, Hans Rancke-Madsen has come up with the notion that pranksters occasionally try to change Library Data entries in order to prove they can do it—this is how he explains several anomalies.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

*I do not mean to deal with certain personal facts that, when revealed, are greeted with the phrase TMI! nor do I intend to cover information as defined by Claude Shannon (extra points to readers who know who he was).

Dec 28, 2009, More Information

Several readers wrote to comment on last issues editorial and offer some comments and further thoughts. Here are a few along with a couple of others that came to me since.

Local Limits: Even if the tech level is high enough to permit a global internet, the local government (or governments in the case of balkanized worlds) might place limits on what data is available. Offworld devices might be restricted, or local standards might be deliberately different. I alluded to this in my last editorial when I said the hi-tech bells and whistles gadgetry will work perfectly well . . . in the starport and probably the startown but I should have expanded on the thought a little more. There are several reasons why a government might want to control data available to citizens, and to others, and it is not necessary to go into them here.

Tech Limits: I had no discussion at all of what might happen if the adventurers gadgets are too advanced for the local technology. Most players that I have talked to tell me that their GMs have no problem implementing difficulties with low tech worlds. On the other hand, one of the assumptions of the literature that **Traveller** is based upon is that problems like different wattage, voltage, frequency, and the like would be minor. Space travelers in stories by Asimov, Niven, Norton and others don't have to worry about their communicators not working or not being able to recharge their electric razors and the designers of **Traveller** followed this same principle. This is why I said the gadgets are likely to work in the starport/startown area.

Volume: The sheer volume of data may prove a problem in and of itself. How many people named Smith (or whatever) are going to be on a world with an extremely high populations and a consistent culture. An inordinate number of unrelated people in Korea are named Kim for example. On a world with extremely large populations, even a small dossier on each citizen might overwhelm the capacity of the adventurers gadgets to simply hold all the information at once, let alone sort through it and process it in any meaningful way.

Finally, an announcement: for those of you within one jump of Austin, Texas this coming weekend, I will be attending **IKKiCon** in downtown Austin, so if you have anything that needs autographing or merely wish to bask in my august presence, this is your chance.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

2010

2010

Jan 11, 2010, Happily Ever After

To the best of my knowledge and belief, no fairy tale ever ended with the words and they all lived happily after.* In modern story-telling, the phrase has become a bit of a *cliché,* and is often used as a shortcut to saying that the rest of the characters lives are not very interesting, and not worth the storytellers time. Also, there is the very practical concern that the story has to end somewhere.

A great many **Traveller** adventures led directly into others, primarily the sequence leading up to The Secret of the Ancients (which was intentional, of course). The other, independent adventures weren't connected in any specific way except the sequence in which they were issued and, thus, the date they were assigned (1105 or whatever). Marc originally intended that the adventures would be used by **Traveller** referees in the order in which they were published, but it soon became clear that this was not to be—people didn't buy the adventures in order, and it was irrational of us to expect them to be run in order. Eventually, adventures were written so that they needn't be run in any specific sequence.

Nevertheless, there has always been a part of the human brain that wants to know what happened next, and the number of sequels of all kinds (books, movies, TV shows and so on) indicate that this desire has become stronger over the years. I never really felt too strong an urge to do this with any of the **Traveller** adventures I worked on with one exception: **Mission to Zhodane.**

The adventure finagled the adventurers into penetrating Zhodani space making use of a personality overlay device to prevent their detection by psionic means. The group stumbles across the machine in a derelict spaceship manned by the 12-year-old daughter of the overlay machines inventor, and I always wondered how the average RPG group ended that one. One wonders if the adventurers managed to lay hands on the machine and how long the girl survived. One of my back burner projects is to take things 20 years into the future: the Imperium eventually laid hands on the machine, and has been totally unable to reverse engineer it. The inventor is dead, and the only person who knows how to build one or even operate it at peak efficiency is the (now 30-ish) daughter of the inventor. I've been toying with various storylines for a few years . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I have to say, of course, that I haven't read/listened to every fairly tale in the world. My main acquaintance with them came about when my mother read to me while I was sick** Later on, I made a systematic study of a few collections my mother bought me from yard sales . . . there was a bound collection of the **Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Anderson,** a (rather bowdlerized) **Arabian Nights,** and a version of the **Grimm's Fairy Tales** that was a little scary (both Red Riding Hood and her grandmother were eaten by the wolf, but the hunter shot the wolf and rescued them by cutting him open not exactly a modern version). I don't remember happily after occurring in any of these.

** This was in the days before the common availability of vaccinations for measles, mumps, and chicken pox, all of which I had within 4-6 months in my youth. As far as I know, I never had Rubella, (known in my days as the German Measles) or Pertussis (called Whooping Cough in those days). The fever associated with each infection was something I simply had to endure, as the treatment in those days was bed rest, aspirin, several blankets, and occasional shots of antibiotic administered in my parents' home by the local doctor (this is known as a house call and isn't done much in the USA any more).

Jan 25, 2010, Then and Now 2

Ewan Quibell's review this issue includes a scenario suggesting the use of **Striker** counters along with the editors deckplans. **Striker** has long been out of print, and, while it can still be had from used game dealers, a facsimile edition is available from Marc Millers' **Far Future** website. The counters are reproduced in greyscale, but I thought the gentle readers* might like to a) learn how to make their own, and b) learn how we at **GDW** used to make playtest counters *back in the day*. We were fortunate to have Rich Banner as our art director. Rich had been making counters for his own games for years, and his techniques were used in almost every **GDW** playtest.

Layout—Back In The Day: Layout is simply laying out each counter on a sheet in an orderly way, so they can be cut out cleanly and neatly. Rich used drawing pens, press-on lettering and drafting techniques to draw out a master sheet of all counters needed. One of Rich's secrets was to do a master sheet at double ordinary size. When reduced to 50% at a blueprint shop, the artwork sharpened up nicely. This was before the days of cheap color printers, so Rich arranged to have the sheets photocopied on different colored paper stock to get different colored counters.

Layout—Nowadays: Thanks to computerized drawing programs, even fumble-thumbs such as myself can turn out reasonable artwork, especially when you use Rich's doubling technique. There are copyright-free clip art sites and fonts with all sorts of symbols and lettering styles as well. The modern artist can use color blocks printed on the paper itself for different-colored counters, and can even reverse the counters so that the symbols and lettering are white on the solid color.

Cutting—Back In The Day and Nowadays: Cutting the counters out is pretty much the same now as it was then, unless you have access to a laser cutter (in which case, follow the directions for your particular machine. After printing, mount the paper counter sheets on sheets of illustration board (sheets of laminated card stock from the art or office supply store—**Strathmore** is one brand). These come in several thicknesses, buy whatever thickness seems right to you (3 ply or 5-ply are my favorites). Use spray adhesive to mount the sheets on the board and be careful not to get glue on the artwork.

Rich would lay everything out so there were little hashmarks on the edges of the block of counters, but did not draw lines between the counters themselves. He then used a steel ruler and a single-edged razor blade or craft knife to lightly scribe the lines separating each counter from the others. Use light strokes, and don't try to cut completely through the board with one stroke. Once every line has had one or two strokes made, begin cutting the counters, again using several light strokes. Hold the straightedge firmly in place, and try to hold the knife at the same angle each time, pressing against the steel. Don't press too hard or the blade may jump and leave you with a scarred counter or a cut finger. Resist the urge to use a paper cutter or heavy shears to cut the counters it is almost impossible to get truly straight lines with either instrument, especially on the thicker grades of illustration board.

With practice, truly magnificent counters can be turned out in this way.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* As Isaac Asimov used to refer to his audience I like it because it sounds so classy.

Feb 08, 2010, Building Things Redux, Revisited*

May years ago, Tom Harris, a friend and fellow gamer built a space station for use with Snapshot and several other tactical miniatures rules, built to 28mm scale and about 7 feet across. It was designed to disassemble easily, and he used to take it to miniatures gaming conventions throughout the Midwest—where it was well-received.** I fought many happy scenarios in the station, and made several half-hearted efforts at building my own version. Tom designed the station with a central core and six pods connected by spokes made of plastic rain gutters (everything lacked a roof, to make moving the minis easier. The entire station was floored in a black grid (plastic canvas from the craft store), which gave a nice SF look to the whole thing.

Books: There are several books about model railroads and these have general application to making wargame and RPG buildings and terrain (a search of **Amazon** for wargames terrain will provide several). My personal favorites are **Buildings for the Military Modeller** by the late Ian Weekley and **Model Railroad Structures**. Both of these focus on historical buildings, but the general principles of construction, advice, techniques, materials, and lists required tools are applicable to every genre of gaming.

Materials: I've mentioned the **Hirst Arts** molds in previous essays, and the use of construction plasters and resin in making castings from these molds. The Hirst molds are very helpful, especial in making detail parts for structures (they have a wide variety of SF details available, and more on the way. Several companies make sheet plastic as well as architectural details of which **Evergreen Scale Models** and **Plastruct** are the most well-known (if you need plastic girders or I-beams, **Plastruct** has a wide selection). If you just need sheet plastic for walls or roofing, a cheap source is the For Sale/For Rent/No Trespassing signs available at hardware stores, usually for less than $1.

Foamcore is a sandwich made of two sheets of cardstock surrounding a layer of fine styrene foam, which is lightweight and strong. It can be found in office supply and art stores, and is most often seen as a part of kits for preparing science fair project displays. Don't overlook cereal boxes and corrugated cardboard cartons as a source of cheap material.

Once of these days, I'm going to build something as impressive as Tom's station. As soon as I find room to keep it in. :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Or Part III, for those who care.
** Science fiction scenarios are very popular at historical miniatures conventions, even though many of the attendees scorn SF as being ahistorical and thus against the general philosophy of historical gaming. Fortunately, these folks are in a minority, and SF, Pulp, Prehistoric Skirmish, and Victorian Steampunk SF (such as **Space: 1889** are common.

Feb 22, 2010, Catching Up with the 20th Century

Thanks to the generosity of one of my greatest fans* in sending me an early birthday gift, I now am one of the 4/5ths of the planet** that has a cellular phone. I am now caught up with the 20th century (not the 21st . . . see below).

First, the technical details: the phone is a reconditioned **Samsung** purchased through **Tracfone**. It is rather primitive, and can't do any of the fancy stuff—I can't take, send, or receive pictures, send text to "short codes" that aren't approved by the **TracFone** people (so

I can't vote for **American Idol** . . . assuming I would ever want to), receive calls/text from outside the US (other than Canada and Mexico) or make calls from outside the US. I can make calls to international numbers from inside the USA, get voicemail, and browse the web (although it's not really worth it on the approximately 30mm square screen). The fiscal details can be had through the **TracFone** link above, but I find them reasonable (especially since I didn't have to pay for the phone).

In addition to making phone calls, the little box has a calendar, a timer, a stopwatch, a calculator, a tip calculator, and several alarms. The screen is also bright enough to serve as a flashlight, albeit a rather poor one. Battery life appears to be typical.

I coped with cell phone lack by using e-mails, public phones, and trusting to dumb luck. I don't make a large number of phone calls, but the advantages of the cellular telephone have been apparent for years, especially since it has become increasingly difficult to find a working public phone other then at a 7-11. I have been exceedingly lucky not to have been in an emergency situation that required a cell phone.

Several years ago, I had arranged to meet one of the regular **Traveller** contributors at a convention. "What's your cell number?" he asked, and I confessed I didn't have one. I remarked that we should just both go to the coffee shop in the con hotel, an arrangement people used to use in the 19th century. As it turned out, we both walked into the place within a minute of each other. "The 19th century seems to work just fine," he remarked.

Despite incidents like this, I've been living on borrowed time (and I hope *Dame Fortune* doesn't decide to "catch up" by dumping several crisis situations on me all at once. I'm not going to be getting rid of the landline for quite some time—I still use a dialup for Internet access—so I'll be carrying the cell for emergencies, leaving it turned off while I'm at home, to save the battery. Still, one more step for an aging RPG author . . . and anyone else who wants to send me a birthday gift can consult my **Amazon.com** wishlist.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Who has asked to remain anonymous.
** According to a recent survey I heard about on TV . . . don't ask me for details.

Mar 08, 2010, Technology and Story

A couple of years ago, I laid hands on the first three seasons of **The Rockford Files, a** popular and acclaimed TV detective series from the 1970s. After a weekend viewing marathon, I was amused to find that the series held up very well compared to modern TV shows, although there were a couple of clangers for modern viewers:

The show is set in Los Angeles, California during the 1970's, and the automobiles are severely out of date. This is not really a problem for most viewers, even most modern ones. It provides a source of humor for some folks, especially when the hero is forced to conduct one car chase in a Volkswagen Beetle! (which was hilarious even at the time). Likewise, the fashions are a bit dated to modern eyes. Men's suits haven't changed much since the 70s, except for trendy ephemera like leisure suits and such. Hairstyles are also a little strange (did people actually look like that?).

After a while, I noticed that telephone technology was rather . . . primitive compared to 21st century standards. Rockford had an answering machine (which was a bit of an advance for the time) but cellular phones were unknown, and mobile phones were rare (because they were expensive and quite large). Upon reflection, I decided that cell phones would have had a minor effect on most mystery/detective story plots, and good writers were able

to make the changes necessary—witness the fact that the cop/mystery/detective genre survives in both print and visual media to this day.

Which brings the discussion around to **Traveller. Traveller** fans expect their characters to be at least as well tied into the planetary communications network as they are today, forgetting that many areas of the US are dead zones for telephone and Wi-Fi service.* This makes it hard for GMs to justify the adventurers being out of contact for any length of time.

Another related problem that is going to become an increasing problem for forensic science is the problem of hi-tech materials destroying evidence of crime. The time will soon come when the rugs, walls, windows, and furnishings in a home will clean up any dirt or contamination, including those pesky bloodstains, hairs, and DNA evidence that play so large a roll in modern criminal investigation plots.

I have confidence, however, in the ability of talented writers (we do still have a few of those left) to overcome this problem as well.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My brother Roger tells me there is a surprisingly large dead zone northwest of Peoria, Illinois, for example, surprising because of the proximity to Chicago.

Mar 22, 2010, Short Subjects

Im writing this a few hours before I depart to Scotland for the **ConPulsion 10 Convention**. Several events are planned, including the usual seminars and such, but this year I get to do something special.

At **GenCon UK** in 2008 I was lucky enough to take one of the items off the list of things I want to do before rolling a new character (:)—I visited Portsmouth and saw **HMS Victory.** As a fan of the **Hornblower Novels** it was quite a thrill for me.

This trip, however, I am going to (hopefully) knock a couple of the highest level items off the list:

Visit part of **Hadrian's Wall** and

The collection of the **Lewis Island Chessmen** (part of them, anyway) at the **National Museum of Scotland**.

Both of these items have been on the list for a long time, and it will be a high point of my life to scratch them off. Roman history is one of my passions, and Roman military history is a major focal point.

Anyway, there isn't much time left before I have to post this on-line, so Ill tell you more when I get back.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I played rather an evil trick on one of the tour guides by asking why there was no mention on the ship that Hornblower's court martial was held in the admiral's cabin. You'd think he'd never existed. I said, and noted with glee the guide's reaction. To his credit, he never lost his temper at the ignorant tourist.

Apr 05, 2010, Being There

As the gentle readers may or may not know, from March 23-29 I had the pleasure

of visiting Edinburgh, Scotland (as a guest of **ConPulsion 10** on the University of Edinburgh—and let me tell you the student union there looks a lot like something out of **Hogwarts**). I had a great time—thanks in no small part to the efforts of a host of **British Traveller** fans who presented me with so many souvenirs I had to pack them into a carry-on bag (which, fortunately, they also gave me).

I was taken on a tour of several sites along **Hadrian's Wall** (a place that I have dreamed of visiting for several decades). The main site I visited was **Housesteads Fort**, one of the most complete forts along the line. I had seen and studied aerial photographs of the site for years, as well as ground plans and maps. None of this prepared me for the fact that the site itself was a considerable distance uphill from the visitors' center, and that the north wall was up a fairly steep slope from the south wall. The steepness of the slopes involved (from my viewpoint as an aging/out of shape, game designer, of course) left me out of breath, forced me to pause several times on the way up (coming down was easier), and left me grateful to the gentleman who suggested I might need a walking stick.

I also visited **Vindolanda**, where I got to see first hand some of the thousands of letters/ reports/ records/ documents preserved on writing tablets. The famous "*birthday party invitation*" and "*please send me more wool socks and underwear*" letters, among others. It was glorious, and I am ecstatic that I got to see it all first-hand.

And yet . . .

There are people for whom being there is no big deal. According to recent research** a growing number of people (I almost typed young people, but it seems to me that this could apply to folks of any age) who find video tours of exotic (and even not so exotic) locales to be as good or better than actually being there. Basically, seeing a thing online is as good as actually being there to these folks.

Some of this I can understand. There are several "*360 degree tours*" online of places (like downtown Rome ca. 120 AD) that no longer exist. I do not blame anyone with mobility issues from preferring a website to tramping over Housesteads—at least not without some motorized assistance).

It seems to me that tourism in the far future might be a mixture of virtual and real, especially as the virtual side of things gets more like reality, and reality gets more inconvenient.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of the things I saw was an actual, honest to gosh blue police telephone box . . . but that's a story for another time (no pun intended).

** I don't remember precisely where I ran across this . . . I think that I ran across the facts in a PBS show on the prevalence of video data on just about everything.

Apr 19, 2010, Adventures in Moving

This issue's **From the Editor** is truncated because I moved over the last week or so, and I am completely and totally exhausted, both mentally and physically.

I attempted to move without planning things out properly, figuring I could simply pack (like I did last time*), rent a truck, and call out my circle of friends from **SJ Games**.

First of all, of the four volunteers that showed up on the first day, only one was under 50 years of age, and the old apartment was on the 3rd floor. We quit before anyone casually dropped from exhaustion.

A couple of days later, we tried again, this time calling in the services of my nephew

and his friend.**

This time, nothing went amiss, except I discovered that I had about twice as much stuff as I thought I did . . . always a problem in moving from one place to a slightly smaller place.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Last time, as I was to discover to my chagrin, was more than 12 years ago.

** Who also happened to be paramedics with the **Austin Fire Department** . . . just in case.

May 03, 2010, Dude . . . When Did I Get Old?

Two things recently started me thinking about the aging rules in **Traveller**—the most recent was my move to a new apartment, which left almost everyone involved with a number of aches and pains (some of them minor, others less so), and the other a photo taken on my trip to Edinburgh last March.

I was photographed standing on the grounds of the old Roman fort at **Housestead's** on **Hadrian's Wall**, and my beard was almost completely white. I was a little the worse for wear, having just climbed several hundred yards uphill to reach the fort, the day was quite blustery and had only just stopped raining (a light drizzle, actually) and I look every day of my fifty-mumble years.

As many of you know, **Traveller** was the first game to include a background for characters, and allow characters to enter the game as something other then an inexperienced teenager. The designers decided to include rules for the deterioration of age, and we had some debate as to when such deterioration began. Based on experience with our older relatives,* we decided that aging effects should begin at 34, but might be put off for quite a while.

I am now in a position to testify that we got it pretty much right. Age 34 is when things start going downhill. It's when my teeth began to fall apart, and when my leg joints (especially my left knee) began to make crackling "rice crispy" noises when I knelt. Later on, the minor aches and pains started, and stuff hurt longer when I injured it. Still later, things started to swell at random times, and stuff started to hurt when I hadn't injured it. I only wish that the **Traveller** design group had been as right about the other things that lay in our future.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* None of us considered ourselves "old" at that time.

May 17, 2010, Rings and Things

I went through several variations on the title of this essay, but **Rings and Things** comes as close as anything. As I was taking a break from uploading the articles for this issue, I notice that the TV show **Law & Order** used the notion of using carbon from a cremated loved one as the basis for artificial gemstones as part of the plot.* In addition, the **ABC News Nightline** for Monday night had a feature on the extreme level people (not just women) will go to with their eyelashes. This brought to mind a subject that **Traveller** hasn't dealt with much—personal adornment.

The illustrations for **Traveller** books were rather tame regarding what people wore in

the way of jewelry. This was mainly because the artists were usually trying to emphasize some other aspect of interstellar culture, but partly because artists (like the rest of us) have a pretty poor record of predicting what fashion trends of the future will be.** I remember a story by Isaac Asimov that tossed a casual description of a female character wearing nothing but a cloud of electronically-generated, rainbow-colored fog that was just dense enough to preserve decorum.

A short period on the streets of any fairly large city, or a glance through a trendy magazine/TV show/website will show enough (mmmmm . . . lets call them out of the ordinary) bits of modern culture to prove that **Traveller'**s artists largely missed the ball. Tattoos are ubiquitous, and have long ceased to be shocking in any but the most formal of occasions. Piercings are common enough that in order to be considered "outrageous" anymore, they need to be present in large numbers and/or large sizes/shapes/colors.

What is commonly called "body modification" or "body art" is starting to show up on the streets of all but the most conservative cities.

One wonders what the future may bring along these lines: Motion picture tattoos? Extra limbs/ears/tails (I've seen teenagers on the streets of Austin with tails sewn to their jeans . . . how long before they are fully mobile and surgically implanted)? Ear piercings (and nose/lip piercings) the size of walnuts are already here. I think these things will become more common as the technology advances enough to make them removable/adjustable/ The mind boggles.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Not missing a chance for a bit of humor, at one point during the show a medical examiner is asked "What can you tell me about the deceased?" and replies "I can see that he was a man of many facets."

** A look at the illustrations accompanying SF stories from more than 30-40 years in the past will demonstrate this fairly readily. TV serials from the 1950s assumes that everyone would wear form-fitting mylar outfits and weapons that look more like hand-held labelmakers.

May 31, 2010, As Time Goes By . . . 2

Many years ago, back when God and I were in school together,* I played games . . . board wargames, tabletop miniatures games, roleplaying games, even the occasional family game. It has struck me recently that my taste in games has changed, and not just all of a sudden. It has been a slow shift over the years, and along several axes at once.

First of all, I've grown less fond of complex games, usually the ones that claim to be accurate simulations of something. The original **GDW** game **Imperium** was one of my favorites: it required players to oversee production of starships, and plan ahead for wars that would take place in the distant future. You had to decide the proportion of various types of warships, and see to it that they got to where they were needed in the nick of time (It would be bad form to arrive ahead of schedule —extra points to the reader who can provide the source of that quote). Over the years, I enjoyed this sort of game, and then gradually—so gradually I didn't really notice it—I came to enjoy such games less and less, until the opportunity to play it again after several years came up, and I found myself suffering through each turn.

Second, I used to enjoy hack & slash type fantasy games more than any other type. Slaughtering hordes of kobolds appealed to me more many years ago, but —again, so grad-

ually I didn't really notice—my tastes in RPGs changed, and I came to appreciate more mentally challenging adventures.

Third, I loved pushing thousands of lead figures around, preferably in the middle of a room full of people doing the same thing. I find that recently I have come to a greater appreciation of smaller scale battles, more skirmishes than battles really. This last, I confess, is not completely true . . . I still find the huge mashups attractive, but I have fewer and fewer chances to participate (especially since I can't see to paint the figures as well as I used to).

I suppose I'm just getting mellower as I age. Or something.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* He was a senior when I was a freshman.

Jun 14, 2010, Why The Future Isn't What it Used to Be

Back in the good old days, when the **GDW** staff was looking for other RPGs to publish, so we could repeat the lightning in a bottle that was **Traveller**, Frank thought there was potential in a game with the working title **The Classic Solar System.** The idea was partly inspired by an advertising line from an advertisement for **Triplanetary: Remember when the best design for a rocket ship was on the hood of an Oldsmobile?*** The idea was that there were a large number of SF fans who were nostalgic for the science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s (and the SF juvenile series of Heinlein and Asimov well into the 1960s). . . back in the days when Mars and Venus had breathable atmospheres, spaceships took off and landed on their tails (most of the time, anyway), and Pluto was still a planet.

One reason we didn't was this: whenever we mentioned the idea to anyone under the age of 30 (or so), they expressed an almost overwhelming opinion that nobody in their right mind would be interested in playing an SF game that was so . . . so unabashedly wrong! SF (and SF-RPGs), we were told, had to be . . . had to be rational prognostications about what the future would be like, and (again) had to be as realistic as this months S**cientific American** (forget about last month's issue hopelessly outdated).

I still run into people who tell me that **GDW** goofed or got it wrong in some aspect of predicting the future in **Traveller. T**hat's not what we were trying to do, first of all, and second of all: very, very, very few science fiction authors have a very good track record in describing what the future will be like.

After a few years, we did learn that what people say they want doesn't always bear a close relationship to what they really want. And what they really want is only a dim reflection of what they will actually buy. By then, however, the **The Classic Solar System** had already been done (by **SJ Games,** among others), so we created **Victorian SF-RPG**s instead. That worked out differently than we expected also, but that's another story.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'm going to not refer to **Google** at this point, but instead suggest that readers too young to remember the **Old's Rocket 88** do so. The reason they aren't around anymore is that they were discovered to be excellent pedestrian eviscerators, and removed from the relevant cars at the insistence of the liability insurance industry . . . I think.

Jun 28, 2010, Pets in Space?

Let me start by giving a short rundown of the original **Traveller** designers:

Marc Miller: Shared his dwelling with several cats over the years, including Pasha (a shorthair) and Susha (a longhair) when I first met him.

Frank Chadwick: Generally an animal person. Had several cats over the years, including Bugs Budenny and Bucephalus, as well as a St Bernard named Waldo.

David Nilsen: Two dogs, named Wisconsin (aka Whisky) and Halifax (aka Hally), both after US naval vessels.

Loren Wiseman: Not an animal person, really. It's not that I don't like them, I like other people's pets . . . I just want them to go home when I'm done playing with them, and Id prefer that they not bite, claw, or leak on me or any of my possessions.* I got along well with all of the above critters, except I disliked Waldo's habit of drooling on my kneecaps as a sign of his love and respect for me.

Now that my prejudices are out of the way, lets go on to the subject of pets in **Traveller.**

I'm not sure why we never did rules for pets on spacecraft or elsewhere. I think it was because we felt there were more urgent things to set down rules for . . . after all, people know how animals behave, and most GMs should be able to adapt. I guess we were more or less right no one ever complained as far as I know. Herewith my thoughts on the suitability of assorted pet species.

Dogs: In general, dogs should adapt well to starships . . . they get along well-enough on surface ships today, and they turn up in SF stories from time to time. I've seen film of a terrier mascot on a WWII destroyer who had a battle station and could don the special life vest the crew made up for him. I have no thoughts on how Vargr would react to pet dogs ... it shouldn't be any different than human reaction to chimps kept as pets, and will probably vary with individuals.

Cats: Likewise, ships cats are a common feature of real life ships and SF stories as well (although these are more than likely to be juvenile stories). For some reason or other, the ship's cat is the most likely non-human in an SF story to have psi powers.

Birds: Parrots are a traditional maritime pet, and other assorted songbirds should also fit in well.

Fish: Fish present certain problems, but these are not insoluble.

The above critters are the most popular, but there are many others that may turn up. Reptiles, including lizards and snakes of various sorts have their adherents, but also have public relations problems with some people, likewise insects and spiders. Miles O'Brien (played by actor Colm Meaney) on **Star Trek: The Next Generation** (and others) had a pet tarantula, to help him over his fear of spiders (a nice bit of character development).

There are hundreds more that can be used by the GM to add some interest: pot-bellied pigs, ferrets, weasels, ant farms, and so on. Since **Traveller** has reasonable life support, pets present no real problems that do not occur in similar sealed environments nowadays. One has merely to look into movies like **Snakes on a Plane** for ideas of how things can go sour, even if the critter is not malevolent.

Nevertheless, I would prefer you take your pets back to your stateroom when I'm done playing with them. :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My brother John holds this is also my approach to children.

Jul 12, 2010, Things We Never Did . . . or intended to do

Many fans ask about **GDW** projects that never made it to publication. Something that fans have never asked about, however, is the stuff **GDW** decided not to do . . . the main reason for this is that potential projects were often mentioned in print or discussed in seminars at conventions, but things we never intended on doing were never mentioned outside of the **GDW** offices, so naturally the fans haven't heard of them. Until now.

Vampire Games: One of the things we decided not to do was conventional horror games, including vampires, werewolves and so on (**Dark Conspiracy*** wasn't a conventional horror game). We weren't fans of the genre, and didn't think we could do it well. One of the projects that never really gelled (but is sort of related) was a witchcraft game, good witch vs bad witch, all hidden from the mundanes, where the PCs reach puberty and discover they have strange powers (hmm . . . where have I heard that before) and find themselves being recruited by both sides.

A Cyberpunk/Net-running/Neuromanticism Game: We incorporated bits of this kind of thing into **2300 AD**, but it never dominated the game. Again, none of us were huge fans of the genre, and it was already being done by other companies.

An Anime/Manga Game: **Manga**? Oh, those funny **Giant Robot** comics advertised in the back of **Hobby Japan Magazine** . . . Wheres the market for that kind of thing? Besides, none of us read Japanese.

A Fantasy RPG: Actually, we considered these a few times, but eventually decided that **D&D** had already cornered the market and we would have to struggle to wedge ourselves in. Better to stick with undiscovered/unexploited markets, like **Twilight: 2000**.

A Collectible Card Game: OK, we talked about this for a couple of hours, but Frank summed it up best: By the time we get it out, the craze will be over. That was probably a mistake, but I doubt any effort along those lines would have proven as profitable as we needed at that time.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

***Dark Conspiracy** was a development of a concept called **Team Omega: Holding Back the Dark** which was inspired by a cartoon we saw at a convention: a Clint Eastwood-as-Dirty-Harry caricature standing over the bullet-riddled corpse of some gargoyle-like thing, over the caption "*Well, its dead. Whatever it was.*"

Jul 26, 2010, Criticism

The *clichéd* phrase says "*everybody's a critic*", which means that a lot of people are willing to criticize things you have worked on.* It used to be via snailmail, and the occasional tirade at a convention, but thanks to that interwebness thing, it is a common (but not oppressive) feature.

Let me relate the most recent critical communication I have received: It seems that one of my fans took umbrage with a page on my personal website that dealt with a few figures I had painted up from the **Wargames' Foundry Historical Series** on the **European Bronze Age** (I'm not sure they are still available or not). My correspondent was disturbed by the fact that I was representing the Bronze Age as a period of war and hatred, whereas all true students of the period knew that the peoples of that era were peaceful and non-aggressive. I was urged to correct my website immediately. I didn't: I had merely painted a few interest-

ing 28mm miniatures, and posted some photos along with a little commentary on how the sculptors had clearly done more than a little research on the subject. I grant that I added a few remarks on how I was creating some appropriate terrain and scenic features and planned to use the figures in tabletop skirmish games (something that is still in progress)— but I planned nothing that would violate history (or, more properly, nothing that would violate prehistory) as we know it.

Aside from this sort of thing, criticism of game designs takes two forms: 1: disagreement with a designers interpretation of fact(s), and 2: some form of "*I wouldn't have done it that way.*"

Very few fans have criticized **Travellers'** choice of scientific facts. A few of them have taken umbrage with various editions/versions of the rules (witness the split between **LBB/ MT/TNE/GT/MongT** supporters). I can't recall anyone who wanted us to redo **Traveller** based on a different theory of **FTL** travel (there were people who asked if we could do another SFRPG with different violations of different laws of physics, but thats another matter entirely).

GDWs board wargames often received long letters in very small, very cramped handwriting (or single-spaced typing) with long arguments about why the 4-6 armored divisions in **Drang Nach Osten** should really be 5-6, because the German panzer division of June 1941 had [insert several pages of To&E information]. This is a variant of the I wouldn't have done it that way. trope.

Most of the time, the criticism isn't personal, and was clearly directed at helping us improve our products. Except the ones that insisted that we should shred the entire print run and re-issue it because we spelled g-r-e-y as g-r-a-y.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Or not, as the case may be. I have been buttonholed at many conventions by a fan who wanted to express disagreement with Marc or Frank, but had to be satisfied with me because I was available. I was the target of one fan who didn't even have the right company's booth. Perhaps he thought we were all the same?

Aug 16, 2010, Recent Events

I recently underwent a quadruple bypass operation. I hope the medical professionals among you will forgive me if I bowdlerize a few things as I report on this event for the readers, who I am sure will be interested. I apologize that there are no articles for this issue, but I am still considerably under the weather, and it took me several days to put this short account together.

SUNDAY (1 August)

On Sunday August 1st, I was feeling a little tired and decided not to do my usual Sunday afternoon shopping trip and to postpone my laundry expedition until the next day. I decided that I did need to take out the trash (collection day is Mondays), so I loaded up the bin and wheeled it to the curb.

I dropped it off and had turned to walk back to my apartment door when my right calf began to tingle. After a step or two, every single muscle in my right calf seized up, and I could not move my right leg. I took a few feeble hops on my left leg and was rewarded with a sudden wrenching pain in my right calf—worse than any muscle cramp I've ever felt, and the second worst pain ever. Fortunately, one of my neighbors in the fourplex I live in saw

my distress, helped me to my porch, and called 911.

One of the paramedics in the responding ambulance turned out to be my nephew, Galen Wasem, who knew the family medical history and something of my own—Galen made a joke of the coincidence, saying that if I had wanted to see him at work we could have arranged a ride-along—I needn't have gone to all this trouble.

He noticed that I was cold and clammy, not hot and sweaty on the 100-degree day, took a blood sugar level and started an EKG. He then declared that he was going to treat the incident as a potential heart attack and I was off to the hospital. I expressed my concern was that the leg pain was a DVT (deep vein thrombosis), which can cause a heart attack, stroke, or pulmonary embolism, and Galen acknowledged that might be true, but insisted that my EKG showed problems as well, and that had to remain his main concern.

The ER doctors said he had made the right decision, ordered a series of tests (mostly for my heart, but they did do an ultrasound of my right leg (which eliminated the DVT possibility). Still, my only pain was in my leg, and I felt nothing out of the ordinary in my chest. I was placed under observation and underwent a series of tests. I began receiving the first of a series of calls from friends and family, which I will not cover in detail.

MONDAY (2 August)

The next day (Monday), it was decided to do a catheterization exam, a stress test, and some other procedures. The calf had recovered almost completely—stiff, no pain , but my blood pressure and glucose levels were very high. My blood work further showed that I had indeed suffered a heart attack and the treadmill and other tests gave the doctors the information they needed for a diagnosis. Diabetes had caused poor circulation in my legs, triggering a cramp. It and high blood pressure masked the crushing chest pain typical of a heart attack, which was why I had felt nothing. I spent Monday recovering from the cath procedure. Last time I had to spend 8 hours flat on my back with a 40-pound sandbag on my hip—things have improved: no sandbag, and only 6 hours with one leg immobile.

TUESDAY (3 August)

The cardiac surgeon who talked to me said there were several variables, but that he thought there was a good chance that the damage to my heart muscle was repairable, but that he could not be certain until he went in—he proposed surgery to install one or more bypasses, and explained what was involved. For the first time in my life I heard the words: "a little under two percent chance of death" in connection with my immediate future. Most of that, it seems, is in connection with general anesthesia). Aside from a few minutes of slight depression, I recovered my composure and I went into the operation feeling very confident that I would emerge alive and unharmed. I had confidence in the skills and professionalism of the people who would be performing the operation, and confidence in western medicine in general—the thought of dying didn't occur to me as a real possibility. I joked with the prep staff and the anesthetist about this being a huge operation, how it was my first time under a general, and how I had saved all my operations up to get them over with in one fell swoop. It seems kind of odd to me thinking back on it that I didn't have more concerns.

WEDNESDAY (4 August)

Wednesday morning I was awakened early for several blood draws (something I was becoming increasingly used to as time passed), and I was eventually taken down to get shaved and prepped for the operation. They drew blood (almost as an afterthought, it seemed) to type and cross match my blood for the operation, and installed an arterial and a central line for the surgery. The arterial line seemed to give the most trouble, and popped out once—as I watched the spurting arterial blood washing across my palm for the second

or two it took to secure things, I remember thinking that this was more of my own blood (15-20 cc) than I had ever seen in one place before. I was wheeled into the surgery area, and the anesthetist told me that he was going to give me the first of a series of injections to knock me out, and a few seconds later, I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, it was late afternoon, my breathing tube was out, and I was in the recovery area. Everything had gone well. I had a large (but closed) incision on my chest, and seemingly innumerable tubes, wires, and drains coming out of my abdomen (and a foley catheter coming out somewhere else). One of the nurses recited a list of everything going in/coming out, and said many of them might come out as early as Thursday if all went well. The operation had gone smoothly, with no complications, and I was recovering well. I spent the rest of Wednesday in the recovery ward, and was transferred to a special section for cardiac patients as Wednesday turned to Thursday.

After going home, I would have odd dreams that I can only attribute to subconscious memories of the operating room.

THURSDAY Through SUNDAY (5-8 August)
I spent the next couple of days having tubes/wires, and such removed from my various bodily cavities, and by Friday I was encouraged to begin doing "laps" of my end of the ward as a means of exercise. I was increasingly visited by roving bands of people in white coats, and by physical, occupational and respiratory therapists. By Sunday, the last of the connections with the outside world had been removed, and I was told I might be able to go home Monday if all went well.

During these days, I had to request light duty pain medications several times for general body aches and some quite significant pains. Aside from the incision scar and the holes for the various drains and such, I had been poked dozens of times for blood draws of various sorts, and my arms and legs were covered in spreading purple bruises. I remarked to one of the nurses that I looked like I had been worked over with a tire iron. I found I could remain comfortable and (relatively) pain free if I did not move. However, since breathing involved moving, remaining still was not conducive to long-term survival.

MONDAY (9 August)
The wee hours of Monday morning saw an episode that must be familiar to many patients in my condition: I ran out of blood. The technician tasked with drawing a few more ccs for various pre-release tests was unable to locate and skewer a suitable vein, and my RN was called. Then the charge nurse. At intervals of 30-45 minutes, calls to higher levels of authority were made, and additional experts added to the retinue in my room. I had remained (mostly) still through several hours of repeated insertions into my skin, some of them involving quite convoluted schemes to capture a vein large enough to provide the needed blood. Finally, someone at a lesser level of authority than the surgeon general achieved the desired result. I was praised for my cooperative attitude and called "a trooper" . . . I announced that I had just been tortured for several hours (albeit for my own good) and demanded cookies. Oatmeal raisin if possible. At least three.

As the group broke up, the charge nurse told me I would get cookies. Within the hour I had three graham crackers (which were a sign of the nursing staffs bona fides, I was told) and at lunch I got a large oatmeal raisin cookie. I was discharged later in the afternoon, and driven home by my nephew the paramedic.

As of August 16, my recovery continues, my sternum seems to be knitting back together on schedule, and the severe pains have faded, revealing the existence of lesser aches I hadn't noticed earlier. My left leg is still one giant bruise, and I still have trouble sleeping more than 1-2 hours at a stretch. My medical bills are currently at $6,200 and counting ...

anyone who would like to make a contribution to help defray my medical expenses (I have no insurance) should go to **paypal.com** and make a voluntary donation to loren@sjgames. com.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Interval
(an interval of many weeks between Aug 16 to October 18 passes)

Oct 18, 2010, Less Sick and Tired
A Progress Report from Loren Wiseman

First, welcome back to the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society.** I apologize for my extended absence, and I regret the necessity of only including two articles per issue for the time being. I hope to get back to the standard three per issue as soon as circumstances (and my health) permit.

In my last editorial, of August 24, 2010, I gave an update on my condition after my bypass surgery. This issue, I'll catch the gentle readers up with my current condition.

First off, I still have a very impressive set of surgical scars, which are still a little sensitive. My chest hair is regrowing, and the itching associated with the massive pre-surgical shaving of my thorax has almost gone away. Coughing and sneezing no longer leave me wracked with pain for several minutes, and the main discomfort I feel now is when I do something to put undue pressure on my sternum (such as roll over too quickly in my sleep). The pain from the secondary incisions in my legs is now gone, although an impressive set of scars remain there also.

My main problems now are 1) that I tire very easily (although that is improving) during my daily exercise walks (sometimes I have to stop partway through and sit on a bus stop bench for a while); and 2) I am still subject to periodic fits of coughing, that disturb my sleep. I can't seem to sleep for more than four hours at a time before a coughing fit awakens me, and then it can take an hour or two to get settled and back to sleep. I usually end up sleeping a few hours during the day or early evening (which is easier, for some reason), which more or less catches me up. My doctor feels that the coughing fits are a side effect of the medications I'm taking for blood pressure, and should go away after my system accustoms itself to the dosage.

To get out of the house, I have been going to **SJ Games** weekly playtest sessions, and have been having a good time. Cabin fever had begun to set in, and I'm glad to be socializing again.

The heart condition was accompanied by a diabetic crisis, and I am now undergoing treatment for that as well as high blood pressure and cholesterol. This requires that I test my blood glucose levels several times a day, and inject insulin based on the results of those tests. I had some familiarity with diabetes due to my family history, but a couple of things stand out to me. First, like a lot of adult diabetics, my system still produces insulin, but I have developed a kind of allergy to it, and my liver refuses to make use of it in processing carbohydrates. I have to learn to recognize the symptoms of too low or too high glucose levels, and be ready to take steps to counteract them.* Second, I was mildly surprised how easily I could accidentally kill myself by injecting the wrong type of insulin—this has convinced me that extra precautions are necessary.

Finally, I am deeply moved by the reaction of the fan base, especially their generosity

in contributing towards my medical expenses (how to do so is explained here. In addition, several companies have held benefit sales of **Traveller** products, including **Ad Astra, FFE, BITS,** and the **TML** is putting together a charity deckplans book with the proceeds to be donated to me. Several fans have seen fit to get me a little something from my **Amazon** wishlist. Another way people can donate is through this link to **Amazon** anything you buy after using that link gets me a cut (at no additional cost to you) so if you're going to buy something anyway, you can get a cut for me. Fans might also want to take a look here and here as well.

Some of the comments you guys have made online and in e-mails about how my work has changed your lives has brought tears to my eyes.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* All of this is complicated by the fact that the symptoms of both conditions can overlap in some people. I have to learn whether the excessive perspiration, dizziness, and the shakes are due to one condition or the other. Fortunately, most of the time what the symptoms tell me is that its time to do a blood test, which gives me concrete data. Still, I feel quite fortunate: when my mother first got diabetes, the only way to test blood glucose levels was to urinate on a paper strip treated with chemicals and compare the resulting color change with a chart. This was not perfect, but was a tremendous advance over the previous technique, which required you to guess whether you were hyper- or hypoglycemic based on physical symptoms, and make a guess at the proper insulin dosage based on them.

Nov 01, 2010, A Few Observations

The readership of the Journal may find a few of my recent observations relevant. I don't claim any particular insight or great originality in these, and I certainly don't think they are anything profound, but here you are:

First, I am mildly surprised at how well I took the news that I was to undergo a serious operation, and might die. Looking back, I had a few moments of depression shortly after my discussion of the operation with the surgeon, but I shook that off quickly, and went into the surgery with full confidence that I would come out and would recover. A later discussion with my regular physician brought up the fact that (in his words) "if you have to have bypass surgery, it's better to have it while you're in your 50s and better able to recover than if you were in your 70s." I don't know if I realized this at the time, but it makes a certain amount of sense in retrospect.* I think part of it was a confidence in modern medical science, and part of it a naive faith in my own immortality.

Second, with regard to insulin: even though the price seems high (I need two types, one of which costs me $107 for 28 days and the second $45 for 28 days**), the supply of insulin is very large. It didn't used to be that way. Insulin used to come from the pancreases of sheep (and sometimes other animals) and the supply was directly proportional to how many sheep people decided to slaughter over a given period of time. People used to eat animal pancreases (and still do), under the name "sweetbreads." A few decades ago, however, an American pharmaceutical company managed to splice the insulin-making gene into a quick-growing, easily cultivated microorganism, and gained the ability to grow insulin in gigantic vats. The supply became as large as needed, and the price may still seem high, but at least there's plenty to go around. Further tinkering with the genetic makeup of the insulin has resulted in slow-acting (almost 'time-release") versions, which solves a number of problems in the treatment of diabetes.

Third, the greatest problem I have with the diabetes regimen is that I am required to eat at certain times, whether I'm hungry or not, and I must inject insulin at certain times, whether I feel like sticking myself with a needle or not (I seldom do, by the way). Testing my blood glucose level means pricking my fingertip with a needle four or more times a day, which is as much fun as it sounds. There are machines that can test blood from the skin of the arm, which is less painful (indeed, my own machine can do so), but my arms don't bleed in the quantities needed for the testing process without poking a deeper hole than is good for me, which also offsets the "less painful" part of the equation.

Fourth, it is often really hard just to get out of bed in the morning, especially since I have trouble sleeping. By the time I am comfortably asleep, the alarm sounds and it is time for me to get up, poke holes in my skin, perform certain medical procedures, and eat breakfast. What I really want to do is roll over and go back to sleep for another few hours, but there are reasons why I can't.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One shouldn't carry this too far, however, or one would find oneself wishing for bypass surgery in one's 20s.

** I am required to discard a vial of insulin 28 days after opening it, whether or not it is used up or not. This seems a bit of a waste to me, but I follow the directions that come with my medication . . . why take unnecessary risks?

Nov 15, 2010, Them Thar Movin' Picture Thangs

Technically speaking, I am still recovering. Every sneeze reminds me that my sternum is not yet completely knit back together* (although it is not the five minutes of agony that it once was). Although I am getting more sleep, it is still only 5-6 hours a night (I make up the rest during the say, as best I can). I am gradually increasing the amount of time I work at the computer (as readers of **JTAS** can see for themselves), but for a while I spent a lot of time reclining and watching TV/DVDs. Some of this was network TV, and some came courtesy a gift subscription to **Netflix** I received as a Christmas present, but a large amount was provided by the kindness of fans who sent me a little something (or, in rare case, a large something) from my **Amazon** wishlist. Some of these arrived while my sister was helping me with my recovery, and she watched most of them with me. I was rather amused to discover a few things about her tastes in film, some of which were rather surprising.

Not very surprising at all was her reaction to **Zombieland (Netflix)** . . . her ideas of a zombie film basically involve **Abbot and Costello** or the **Three Stooges**—the notion of a parody of the zombie genre (which **Zombieland** is) was foreign to her. She also didn't like **Leatherheads,** (also **Netflix)** a George Clooney vehicle concerning professional football set in the Depression era. "It wasn't about football," was her complaint. The 1990s series **Sliders (Netflix)** left her cold, but I found the series did not live up to my memories of it either. I was rather surprised, however, to discover that she liked the 1960s TV series **Combat,** which is one of my favorites I am re-acquainting myself with through **Netflix**.

On the other hand, she was entertained by the romantic/nostalgia comedy **My Favorite Year** (from my private collection) and a few episodes of **Stargate: SG-1** (courtesy a fan through Amazon) and she was absolutely thrilled by **Pinky and the Brain** (thanks to the loan of the discs from a friend). **Netflix** also provided a film from the UK titled **The Dam Busters**, which, in the final scenes, has many resemblances to the attack on the **Death Star** in **Star Wars**.

I decided not to view some of my fan's largess . . . I doubt she would have tolerated the complete **Greatest American Hero** or **Dangermouse** (both from fans through **Amazon**) very well.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* And my doctor tells me I won't recover more than 80% of its original strength in any case. If I were a body builder, this would matter, but I'm not, so I think I can manage.

Nov 29, 2010, If I Knew Then

I occasionally get asked (mostly at conventions) what I would do differently if I knew then what I know now.

My response is usually something along the lines of: What do I know now? A few years ago* I started giving a standard answer that was usually the only thing I'd change is that I wouldn't pay full price to see **Aliens 3.** In general, I was (and still am) pretty happy with the way my life turned out, and my thoughts were that any attempt to change things would undoubtedly mess thins up worse (If The **Twilight Zone** has taught us anything, it is don't mess with the past).** My notion was that if I was given a chance to change my past in any significant way, I'd mess things up worse.

There are quite a few hurtful things I wish I hadn't said, and a few things I wish I hadn't done. Of course, I should have taken better care of my health.

Mainly, I wish **GDW** had not gone out of business, because I spent some of the best years of my life working there. I wish we had taken **WOTC** up on its offer of paying for **Challenge** advertising in stock rather than just telling them Go ahead and pay us when you can.

Overall, however, aside from a certain lack of disposable income in my present situation, things have worked out pretty well. One thing recent events have taught me is that I have a large number of very devoted fans, and any writer wouldn't trade that for anything.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* More properly, this phrase should now be something along the lines of "*a couple of decades ago. . .*"

** Actually, **The Twilight Zone** has taught us several things:

Technology will usually betray you. This is one of the more annoying underlying tropes of the series, but it is there nevertheless.

Most episodes with Burgess Meredith are bad news.

Just when you think you have aliens figured out, they will do a complete 180 on you. The one you kill was planning on giving humanity the cure for all diseases (Including politics), and the kind ones are planning on eating us.

Elizabeth Montgomery was a major babe. Even if she's Rooshian in one episode. Greed is bad. Greed is always punished. Every single time.

Death is either a cute little girl or looks like Robert Redford. Nothing is said about lying in a hole with dirt in your face holding your breath forever.

Don't look out the window—there really is something on the wing.

Dec 13, 2010, Conventions 2010

I love attending conventions—both SF cons and gaming cons—and have ever since my first SF con (a **WindyCon** back in the late 1970s). I especially enjoy attending cons as a guest,* for several reasons.

First of all, I get treated like a celebrity. People come to listen to me talk, and often hang on my every word. I sometimes have an entourage, which is kind of a thrill. I get asked for autographs, get photographed, and sometimes even interviewed.

Second of all, at big cons, where I am only one guest among many, I get to hobnob with people who are even more famous than I am. I have met no small number of famous SF authors, movie and media celebrities, and other folks, and get to hang out in the green room (the room at a large convention where the guests can drink, snack, rest and unwind between seminars/panels/autograph sessions). I have met, among others, Peter Jurasik, Virginia Hey, Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and many others too numerous to mention.

Third of all, and by no means least, I get to talk to the fans, gaining direct feedback about the things I've worked on over the years, and learning what works and what doesn't

My most recent con experience, however, was **Conpulsion 2010**, held in the Teviot Row students' union at Edinburgh University in Edinburgh, Scotland. This was a particular thrill for me as I recounted earlier. One of the thrills was finding a real, honest to gosh blue police box in an alley in Edinburgh—my guide (a native of the city) had never seen one either, and thought they didn't exist any more—we knocked on the door, and . . . well, that's a story for another time!

I hope to continue attending conventions for as long as the **ConComs** will have me.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For con organizers who are interested, I have two basic requirements for attending a convention:

1) it must be revenue neutral for me. All costs of my transportation, lodging, meals, and incidental expenses must be covered, preferably in advance.

2) I need someone to guide me around the show, to make sure I don't get lost. Other than that, I'm pretty flexible.

Dec 27, 2010, The Value of Ideas

Over the years I have discussed ideas in one form or another. Once in a while I run across someone who doesn't realize what ideas are worth, and I thought I'd focus on that this time around. I don't mean to discuss the worth of ideas like freedom of speech or the like, but ideas like What would happen if two kids fell in love, but they came from two mutually hostile families? or *What would happen if a young Hobbit is given a Herculean task to perform in order to save the world from a great evil?*

SF author and all-round great guy Mike Ford used to say that ideas are 13 cents a silo.* what he meant was that ideas are easy to come up with, and that it is what we do with the ideas for plots and the like that gives them value.

Lester Smith, one of my colleagues at **GDW,** used to say that most people want to be a writer, but few of them want to write. Many years ago I read a magazine my father received called **Mechanics Illustrated** and one the things I remember most was a column on inventions. The author of the column was a patent attorney who laid out what it really took to get

a product from the nebulous idea stage to manufacturing and marketing it. He had a long list of problems, not the least of which was that almost all of his prospective clients wanted to be inventors but weren't willing to do the drudgework necessary to invent. One of them made an appointment for a one hour session in which he outlined his world-beating idea: a disposable paper ashtray containing some kind of chemical to extinguish cigarettes. He hadn't a clue what that chemical might be . . . he felt that this was merely elaborating on the basic notion, and not worth his time.

I often run across people, either on line, in (snail) mail, or in person at conventions who have a world-beating idea for a novel, game, or TV show. They are sometimes willing to share this idea with me in return for half the profits (other times they want my assistance in locating a co-creator willing to share in the largess sure to result from releasing their notion on the world). Sometimes they want my help in copyrighting or patenting this notion, believing that once the notion is legally protected, they need only sit back and wait for the money to pour in.

I wish this were true. Getting the idea into salable form is the hardest part, and I wish I were faster at it. Writing, as Lester knew, is hard work—not as hard as coal mining perhaps, but hard nevertheless. It requires determination and patience, and a willingness to sit at a keyboard, pounding your head against the keys until words appear on the screen.

The ideas, in and of themselves, aren't worth much. The work that you put into them making the individual bits hang together, making the whole agglomeration interesting enough that people are willing to pay money for it, thats where the value lies.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I think he got this from a 1970's comedienne, who was discussing the inflated price of theater popcorn by saying that popcorn was basically very, very cheap and theaters overcharged heavily. Mike also used to say that ideas were 13 cents a carload, 13 cents a truckload, and 13 cents a metric ton. I don't know why he picked the number 13.

2011

2011

Jan 10, 2011, Some Things Hold Up Better Than Others

Over the years, many **Traveller** authors have discovered that books, movies, and television shows make great sources of inspiration for adventures. Completely aside of their suitability for adaptation as the basic plot for an adventure, some things hold up to critical watching better than others. Herewith two examples, one from the 1960s and one from the 1980s, which represent examples of things that are both worth the effort to read/watch even decades later, but vary in the ease with which they can be adapted for an adventure.

The first, Eric Ambler's 1965 spy novel **A Passage of Arms,** deals with an American tourist who becomes involved in international gun running. The locale and the historical background are firmly rooted in the politics of the post WWII British Empire, but by simply substituting the historical elements for game background elements a very good adventure or series of adventures can be plotted out. A pair of Hindus in Malaya run across an abandoned arms cache and, after waiting until things cool down, resolve to sell them, but they need a go-between, which shows up in the form of a slightly naive American. Change Malaya to any one of a number of worlds where the Ine Givar have failed to take over, change the American to any suitable race of Humaniti, and (perhaps) change the Hindu brothers to a pair of Bwaps with a slightly un-Bwap attitude towards illegal arms sales, and you have a good adventure session that holds together because Eric Ambler came up with a basically sound plot.

The next item involves an episode titled "**Lions, Tigers, Monkeys, and Dogs**" from **The Rockford Files: Season 6,** starring Lauren Bacall and Dana Winter as wandering dilettantes, one of whom has a deadly secret. The problem with the basically sound plot is that it does not transfer well to **Traveller.** So much of the secret involves information that would be available as a result of any decent database search, it is necessary to jump through a few hoops to keep the players from tripping over the answer almost too soon.

Nevertheless, both adventures hold up well over the years, and are shining examples of the adventure gold to be mined from old sources.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jan 24, 2011, Everything Old Is New Again

Over the years many of my friends and acquaintances have been involved with historical recreation societies. Most of these have been military in orientation,* but a few are more concerned with recreating other aspects of the past. I know a few people who enjoy cooking on a wood-burning stove as a hobby,** and a great many who prefer to cook using as few modern implements as possible. I know people who restore old cars, electronics (tube radio sets are very popular) and antique cars. A close friend is into what he calls aboriginal archery where he makes his own archery equipment using archaic tools (he buys the arrowheads, because his wife won't let him work with hot metal, but otherwise he rolls his own.). There are mountain man recreators, colonial recreators, American Indian recreators, and so on. There was a popular series of television shows where people (usually a family group) lived a certain amount of time completely in the technology of the past. Some of them (usually the parents) seemed to enjoy it . . . others (usually the adolescent children) were less taken by the concept.

Some people get paid to live in the past . . . the inhabitants of Colonial Williamsburg and other places throughout the world earn a living recreating some part of their lives

for tourists or as part of a historical research project (or both). Many students of archaic engineering practice a craft with genuine tools and techniques, trying to learn more about the subject than can be found in old books (for many crafts, a lot of the techniques weren't written down).

In **Traveller**, we have the authenticist movement, various groups who believe in living in the past more or less completely. Like most such groups today, the vast majority of them limit themselves in one way or another, but I wonder what sort of things they do in the common household line?

Are there groups who do completely without food processing units, and actually prefer to heat their own meals in a microwave oven? Who have only non-automated refrigeration units, and storage cabinets that do not monitor food consumption and have to order replacement foodstuffs themselves?

One wonders just how far some of them are willing to go? Is there a popular TV series called **2130 House?**

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For some reason, certain wargamers are attracted to recreating various past wars . . . go figure. I have had the privilege of knowing several people who had bit parts in Gettysburg, and others, including a gentleman of Asian descent who portrayed the only Asian soldier to serve in the Union Army.

** I don't know any who do it out of preference, but I understand they do exist.

Feb 07, 2011, Status Update

I try to be studiedly untrendy, but I make exceptions sometimes. A status update is evidently what one does on social media websites to keep one's friends (and whatever random strangers decide to drop in) up to date on what you are up to. So, here we go:

Health-wise, I am no better but at least no worse. A blood test of my thyroid levels discovered no abnormalities, so my doctor remains mystified as to why I continue to be unable to lose weight, regain energy, or get my blood pressure down. I sometimes have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, knowing that the first thing I have to do is stick myself with a needle and draw blood for a glucose level, and that the second thing I have to do is stick another needle in and inject whatever amount of insulin the doctor's instructions indicate my blood glucose level requires . . . then I have to eat breakfast. Then and there, even if I'm not hungry (because the insulin will kick in in half an hour, and I could pass out if I don't eat). The rest of the day depends on whether I have to go in to **SJ Games World HQ** that day or if I can work from home, whether I have any errands to run (shopping, laundry, a visit to the pharmacy, or whatever). If I didn't sleep well the night before, I need to set aside time for a nap to get caught up. Cash is still tight, the medicine still costs as much as it ever did, and going to visit my doctor costs me $65 to say hello (he sometimes waives other charges, however . . . I got the thyroid lab tests done *gratis*, for example)..

I'm trying to get the energy levels back that will enable me to finish the 3-4 deckplans I have on the back burner and put them up for sale, then finish the outline on a WWII novel I started a few weeks before the surgery while the inspiration is still with me. I also have a notion for a **GURPS Traveller** world book that I want to present as a finished project rather than hand it over in dribs and drabs.

Meanwhile, I've joined **Facebook** finally giving in to the requests of my brother and other relatives to do so. Actually, what did it was discussions with other gaming profession-

als that convinced me that I could use the service to sell my PDFs and other things.

So far, I've discovered that trying to play **Farmville** over a dial-up connection is an exercise in frustration, and that the tune for **Cityville** is very, very annoying. And I've made some potentially profitable contacts in the industry. More news as it breaks.*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are no footnotes this time, except for this one.

Feb 21, 2011, Hittin' The Big Six-Oh

Next month (at 11:43 PM, March 7th, to be exact) I reach the age of 60.* Being as how there is only one way to avoid turning 60 . . . it involves dying before then . . . I don't intend to exercise that option. Anyway, Id like to share a few thoughts on this milestone.

First of all, the matter of hair. My mother's hair was black, quite dense, and showed very little gray until she was well into her 60's. My head hair is showing the same pattern: the odd white hair here and there, a smallish patch of gray at the temples (that many people tell me is distinguished—yeah, right), and thick swatches of grizzly gray throughout my beard (which my mother did not experience). Unlike my brothers and my father, my head hair is still present, *albeit* thinning a bit. Several friends have suggested that if I were either to shave my beard or use one of those color only the gray hair color products, I would look decades younger. I'm tempted, and if I could spare the money I might try it. Likewise, the minor hair loss I am experiencing is evidently one of the things that yields most readily to minoxidil.

Second, my hands. I spend quite a lot of time working with a computer, and I am noticing that my fingers are not as supple as they once were. The joints are stiffening, and I have some occasional minor pain. I have yet to find this interfering with minis painting, but it gets to me after several hours at the keyboard. My medical advice is that this may simply be part of the aging process, or that it may be the initial symptoms of arthritis. Something that has been increasing in the last couple of years is a slight tremor from time to time, rather like what my elderly relatives used to call palsy. Additionally, I sometimes have trouble moving some fingers individually . . . sometimes the neighboring finger wants to come along for the ride, and this can cause problems on the computer keyboard.*

Third, things ache—sometimes for days on end, and for no apparent reason. It is mostly my joints, but sometimes the longer muscles, and sometimes my feet. For numbers two and three, a couple of ibuprofen tablets once in a while take the edge off, and that's enough for now.

Finally, Eyesight: Years ago, my younger brother and I were comparing opinions and discovered that we had some opposing feelings. I confessed that I was more concerned about losing my eyesight than I was about losing my hearing, whereas he felt the opposite. My brother experienced the most enjoyment of the world through his ears, listening to music primarily. I enjoyed reading, painting miniatures/wargaming, and watching movies, all of which involve eyesight. I am now about the age my father was when he lost much of his close-up eyesight to diabetic retinopathy, forcing him to give up his hobby of clock and watch repair. I benefited from this by inheriting his tools, which were perfect for model-making, and which I had been borrowing for years. In addition to diabetic retinopathy, I can look forward to possibly encountering macular degeneration, and I have already been experiencing presbyopia (old eyes). There is some hope that I can avoid the worst of these problems, but some deterioration of the eyesight is inevitable with age. I sometimes think that this is fate saying to me What gives you the greatest joy in life, I can take from you . . .

and if you find something else to replace it, I can take that, too. In a way, I am getting a small advance window on this: my DVD player is beginning to fail on me, and I will probably not be able to afford to replace it for quite some time.

Everything noted above is showing up in addition to the problems associated with my newly diagnosed diabetes, high blood pressure, and the recovery from my heart attacks and bypass surgery. As a friend of mine said recently, Getting old is not for the faint of heart. All in all, however, I still look forward to what the future brings. In a couple of years, Ill have been a professional game designer for 40 years, and I'm looking forward to many more birthdays to come.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I am dining out with friends that night in celebration. For those who care to help me celebrate, I suggest my **Amazon** wishlist.
** And with playing a guitar, if I had ever learned to do that—I must ask my younger brother (now late 50-ish) if he is encountering a similar problem.

Mar 07, 2011, Risk*

One of the features of the game business (and, I think, of business in general) is that the more successful you become, the more risk averse you have to be. When **GDW** started out, there were only the four original partners: Frank Chadwick, Marc Miller, Rich Banner, and myself. We could try all sorts of crazy stuff (gigantic games about the Eastern Front in WWII, games about obscure campaigns such as the Chaco War in the 1930s or the Roman Rhine Frontier in the first century AD, tactical starship warfare with a unique vector movement system) and the only people who were affected by our success or failure were ourselves. As the years rolled by and our successes allowed the company to grow, we hired other employees, and from then on, we couldn't take the same chances we took earlier. Not only ourselves, but our employees (and after a while, spouses and families) came to depend on our decisions about what would sell and what was worth allocating resources towards.

There is a movement that dates back many years that has come to be called "indie games"—independent game designs—that is characterized by non-standard subject matter, novel approaches to design mechanics, and games that take risks or are not intended to appeal to a wide segment of the market. For a while, several of us at **GDW** used to joke that "independent game companies" meant "small game companies"—after all, even the giants like **TSR, SPI,** and (if I may say) **GDW** were independent in the sense that no other company owned them.

The word "independent" actually meant "free of commercial constraints on design" more than "not owned by anyone else (and actually, one of the largest companies, **Avalon Hill**, was owned by a printing company, **Monarch Printing**).

When you don't have a day job other than game publishing, when your income and well being as well as that of twenty or thirty others depends on how well your ideas work out in the marketplace, it tends to make you more conservative. All companies have limited resources—money, time, design talent, production assets, advertising dollars, and so on—and the movers and shakers of any company need to maximize the return on the investment of these resources. You learn fast that not just you suffer when you make a mistake. The bigger the investment, the more certain you need to be that you are not just flushing resources down the drain.

This is why **GDW** focused on **Traveller** to the exclusion of other RPGs for several

years. We could have spent time and treasure creating another game that might or might not sell, or we could put those same resources into a known entity and count on a certain level of return.

Of course, a certain degree of innovation is necessary for success, and arguably **GDW** stuck with **Traveller** as its sole RPG for too long. There are a few things I wish we had done differently, but overall, we managed to create something that has endured for more than three decades, and is approaching its fourth. In the final analysis, that's a measure of success all its own.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I am not talking about the game **Risk**, which was produced by **Parker Brothers** back when I got my first copy in the early 1960's, and which I played until it wore out . . . and replaced it several times. The game is still available, and the armies are represented by miniature plastic infantry, cavalry, and artillery pieces—which in some ways makes the game way cooler. **Parker Brothers** is now a part of **Hasbro.**

Mar 21, 2011, Anticipation

A Few Things The Editor is Awaiting with Pleasure:

A Cure for Diabetes: I have recently promoted this higher on the list, now that I have the condition. Previously, I wanted it for my assorted relatives/friends that had it . . . I think you can guess why. Enough said.

Three Dimensional Printing: I'm waiting for an inexpensive home 3D printer. There are industrial models available (for a price), but I want something for about the present cost of a decent color laser printer* so I can use the next item to make hordes of decent tabletop minis.

Three-Dimensional Drawing Software: I want a good quality home version of the 3D drawing software available at a king's ransom to multi-millionaires. And the talent to use it . . . :)

A Cure for What Ails Me: I want someone to fix my eyes so I can see normally (or at least well enough to do a decent paint job on minis without three spotlights and a magnifying lens), get rid of my surplus blubber, and stop all the minor aches and pains I have been experiencing the last couple of decades . . . a cure for aging, in other words—one that is free or heavily subsidized by someone or something other than my bank account.

I assume the Gentle readers are starting to see a pattern here?

I'd also like a nice gaming pleasure palace to set my proposed tabletop miniatures campaigns in, with some good quality gaming tables, provisions for guests/opponents to stay overnight and high-class refreshments.

Maybe I could get some decent gaming done, for once?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I can't afford one of these either, come to think of it – I want an inexpensive home way of making full color (including white on clear backing) waterslide and dry transfer decals, with the capability of getting really good, high quality **Pantone**®-type color as well as CYMK.

Apr 04, 2011, Lost Arts

I have noticed that some things seem to be vanishing from modern society . . . or at least are becoming harder to find.

Telling Time: Because I wear a watch, I am often asked for the time by people at places like bus stops. Sometimes I used to show the watch to the inquiring person, but as I did so, I noticed an increasing number of people could not tell what time it was. I prefer an analog clock face, one with hands and a dial, because I find it easier and faster to read and interpret in dim light. I find it hard to picture time without referring to a clock face (at least mentally). If I want to picture what time it will be in 20 minutes, for example, I imagine a round clock face instead of noting the time, adding 20 minutes, and adjusting for base 60 (perhaps this is my own mental block).

Making Change: When I was in elementary school, we all learned to make change by playing a game: each of us got to be a storekeeper of some kind (equipped with wares drawn on construction paper—pictures of cars and boats and bunches of bananas) and we took turns buying and selling things, paying for it using play money (also drawn on construction paper and carefully cut out using our safety scissors).* The purpose of the exercise was to teach us how the mercantile world worked, but also so we could learn how to quickly and accurately make change – we were taught to count up: to give change for $2.37 from a $5 bill, we would count out the pennies first until we reached a convenient unit, then carry on up the higher value coins. "three cents makes two forty, a dime makes two fifty, two quarters makes three, and two dollars makes five. I often turn into sales people at stores who do not know how to make change. Most of the time they depend on the cash register to tell them to hand over $2.63, and are incapable of functioning when something goes wrong.

The Art of Conversation: And by this I mean the art of carrying on one conversation with one person at a time. I am encountering increasing numbers of people who are trying to talk to me, carry on a conversation with a second person on the phone, and text one or more additional people at the same time. I am not the only person who has noticed this, and I am not the first one to decide that people are not as good at multitasking as they think they are. A recent report on the **ABC Evening News** told of a college professor who decided to test students in his psychology classes to determine if they actually could do several things at once as well as they could when they devoted their whole attention to it. The results were almost predictable. People could generally cope with doing two things at once, but after that there was a marked deterioration in the quality and speed of multiple tasks performed at once, yet the students still claimed they were performing up to snuff at all tasks.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* No points to stick the unwary, but it was still possible to cut yourself if you weren't paying attention. Do schools still have these, of have they forsaken scissors altogether?

Apr 18, 2011, Studies Have Shown

Im sure many of you have run into this little phrase before. Sometimes it is stated "*as recent studies have shown or recent surveys have shown* . . . " but they are basically the same: they have little basis in fact. Oh, sure, once in a blue moon there actually is a scientific study on the subject in question, and the person quoting it can actually refer you to the relevant journal(s) but most of the time not.

For example, those of you who have worked in retail have no doubt heard that studies have shown that customers prefer to buy from stores where retail products are carefully

aligned on the shelves like soldiers on parade. The real reason is that managers seem to need some kind of scientific backup for the default job of every retail employee: cleaning and straightening the store. If there is no other work to be done, the command Face the store is given, and any complaints are met with the Studies have shown . . . fable. Actually, for all I know, there may have been an actual study sometime, somewhere, but I'm sure it is from the 1950s, and I doubt it was much more than anecdotal. If you think about it a little, I'm sure the average retail customer would prefer not to have to reach back into some dark, dank shelf to retrieve a can of beans or a pack of batteries. This, however, is not the same as a proper scientific double blind study.

By the way, if you look at photographs of old (pre-WWII) retail stores such as grocery, dry goods, or hardware stores, you notice something odd: the places are all laid out so that customers cannot readily get to the products. The customer enters the store, goes to the counter and requests a list of goods from the store clerk, who gathers them all together, boxes/bags/bundles them up, and totals the charge, which like as not the customer either pays in cash on the spot or requests to have the charges added to their tab (which they may be billed for later). The modern self service store began in the late 1930s and proliferated after WWII.

Another fable I've heard from various sources is that studies have shown that people work/play/feel more comfortable/are more alert in rooms with a [insert color a] and [insert color b] color scheme. Over the years, I've seen these colors vary through every color of the rainbow (including burgundy/light grey, lime green/canary yellow, and light green/kelly green). The particular colors seem to vary with the decades and locations, as well as with the individual company hiring the decorators. If these things represent real, provable scientific concepts, how come every color combination is different, and how do you eliminate the "*people are happier if they think management cares about them, so they react to anything*" factor?

It would be nice to have some Zhodani involved in the consulting, so we could get an idea what is really going on.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 02, 2011, Small Changes*

It has recently come to my attention that panhandlers in Austin, Texas have been complaining about a new and ominous (to them) trend people aren't carrying cash any more. I noticed this about myself several years ago—I don't carry nearly as much cash as I used to. When I was in high school, I had a paper route and a source of funds for the first time in my life. In those days, I would regularly carry $50-$100 cash on my person. There were several reasons, not the least of which was I didn't like carrying a checkbook with me and if I wanted to buy something, the only alternative was cash or credit cards (which they did not give to 16-year-olds in the 1960s). To put things in perspective, a mass market paperback book was under $2 in those days, sometimes $0.50 to 0.75, a gallon of gas or a loaf of bread were both under $0.25, and a sumptuous repast could be had for less than $5.

Nowadays, I carry less than $5 in cash on me most of the time.* I have a debit card that I use for almost everything, the sole exception being those things (like vending machines) that don't take cash any more. I have a cell phone, so I don't need coins for pay phones any longer. Almost every store I shop at takes my debit card, which taps directly into my bank account. I simply do not need cash very much any more.

I can see why the panhandlers are concerned.

Interestingly enough, **Traveller** has provisions for cash and even coins for purchases, but little in the way of details on credit/debit cards or similar arrangements. I guess we figured people knew how such things worked, and didn't need rules for them.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This is a call-out to one of my favorite musical albums.
** The main exception being when I need quarters for doing laundry, when I need \$10 or so.

May 16, 2011, My Status

I thought it was time to update the fan base on my health. Basically, I'm doing OK, but there are some unsettling developments. I developed what is called cellulitis on my right foot, which is basically a skin infection requiring antibiotics and gauze bandages from time to time. Diabetics are prone to such skin infections, and I have to buy a special foot/leg lotion to keep the skin of my extremities from cracking and becoming a site for such things.

More recently, my legs have begun to swell alarmingly by the end of the day, and my medical advisors have yet to decide on a course of action. The upshot of this is that my legs are stiff and hard to move, and I tire more easily than before. Not good since I'm supposed to be exercising. It also makes it hard for me to negotiate changes in elevation such as steep inclines and stairs, and means that I have trouble getting up from low level chairs and such. I stumbled last Sunday, fell to the ground, and found it quite an operation to stand up unaided.

I continue to be unable to get my weight or my blood pressure down to acceptable levels. Weight gain is one of the less useful side effects of taking insulin that isn't your own.*

I should point out that several of the problems I am experiencing are side effects of the aging process, and cannot be solely blamed on diabetes or my surgical recovery. I still have a horrible 6" scar down the center of my chest, although the scars on my left leg have faded to near invisibility.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Along with swelling of the hands and feet. I am hard pressed to find a beneficial side effect of taking insulin that isn't my own, and would stop the practice, but it seems that I (like a lot of adult diabetics) am immune to my own insulin, and have to take someone elses.

May 30, 2011, Mercs

It should be no secret that the staff at **GDW** back in the day were wargamers. We were, after all, a wargaming company before we became an RPG company. Our common interests were in military history and military affairs, and wargames were our bread and butter for years. When **Traveller** came out it incorporated a sizable military component, and it was only natural that we would deal with wars in some detail.

For years, all or us had read novels such as Andre Norton's **Star Guard**, the works of David Drake (especially **Hammer's Slammers**), the co-writings of Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (especially **Falkenberg Stories)** and numerous others of what would become the sub genre of military science fiction. Frank Chadwick, being Frank, wanted to bring this

kind of adventuring to his **Traveller** playtests, and had soon worked out the basics of what would later be published as **Book 4: Mercenary**.

Marc Miller's father had served in the **US Navy** and Marc had an abiding interest in naval warfare, which he soon put into **Traveller** as well, taking a leaf from Frank and doing an expanded character generation for naval characters and publishing it (along with a large scale fleet action combat system) in **Book 5: High Guard.**

Our roots in wargaming made it natural for us to create boardgames of assorted conflicts of the **Traveller** background: **Fifth Frontier War, Invasion Earth,** and other titles eventually appeared, making Traveller a boardgame genre as well as a role-playing one.

I suppose you could call it a "*multi-media*" approach . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 13, 2011, Character Flaws

Well, sort of. Some of the items I discuss below aren't really flaws,* but more interesting quirks. The title I've chosen, however, is eye catching, however.

My first interesting quirk/feature/flaw is that I cannot eat seafood. Not knowingly, anyway. The notion that I should eat something other than a bird or a mammal (and only limited varieties of those, also) fills me with disgust and can make me nauseated. If I actually eat seafood, I usually vomit almost instantly. This is a mental problem—I am not allergic to seafood, I merely cannot abide the thought of eating it. Several experiments by friends have determined that if I am given seafood by subterfuge, I can tolerate it . . . until I find it. Then, I tend to throw up, most of the time, and I am almost always quite ill for an extended period. I can keep down those components of sushi that are not seafood, including seaweed and such-like plant material, and I can tolerate small quantities of things like shrimp in a Chinese eggroll, for example. But I've never been able to keep fish, mollusks, and such like down for long.

Second on the list: pets. I'm not really an animal person. I don't want a pet/companion animal/whatever they are calling them these days. I'm not interested in fish or ferrets or an ant farm. When I was younger (up to age 14 or so) I was deathly frightened of dogs, and some trace of that phobia still remains although I dealt with most of it when I got a paper route dogs are one of the features of that occupation. I don't mind playing with some dogs, and I feel the same about cats. I sometimes phrase things this way: I like other peoples dogs . . . and cats . . . and children. I like them not to bite, scratch, and/or leak on me, and I like them to go away when I'm done playing with them. As for other critters, I find reptiles repulsive and birds a waste of time. Things like tarantulas or scarab beetles make my skin crawl.

Lastly, I am not a vegetarian. My feeling is that if pigs/chickens/cows/ducks/etcetera do not want to be eaten, they shouldn't taste so good.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* And most of them are not really about my character, either . . .

Jun 27, 2011, Run That By Me Again?

I occasionally run into things that make me want to stop the video of life, rewind, and replay it.* One of these occurred while I was in a hotel room during a convention a few years ago. It was oh dark-thirty AM as they say, and I was lying in bed idly flipping through the channels on the television when I hit a promo for an upcoming program which I heard, in my nodding off to sleep state as **Keeping Up with the Cardassians.** It turns out that this was actually **Kardashian**s and chronicles the escapades of one of those famous for being famous neo-celebrity families that have been popping up for a decade or so (Im not providing a link).

Another happened when I was working part-time at the information desk in a bookstore a few years back: I was approached by a high school student who was looking for an English translation of **Hamlet**. I was momentarily taken aback . . . **Hamlet** was written by one of the greatest writers the English language has ever known. I almost immediately hit on the source of the students trouble, however . . . **Hamlet** was written in Elizabethan English, which differs considerably from todays version of the language. I suggested the purchase of one of those study guides that have the text of the play on one page and copious notes explaining the archaic word usage, period humor, and other things on the facing page.

At this point, Id like to insert a comment: I think lot of modern students have trouble with Shakespeare's plays because they are most often assigned as reading in English Lit classes . . . the plays were meant to be performed, and should be read aloud in class for maximum impact. There are many movie versions of various plays, and these can be shown in class as well (especially of the students dramatic skills are not up to par).

The final moment I blame on the fact that I was falling asleep listening to a radio appeal for donations to the **Easter Seals** charity . . . I heard it as *Ishtar Seals*—which I can only blame on my free-wheeling brain doing a free-association as I was nodding off.

The gentle readers are left to research Ishtar and the possible connection with the Christian Easter holy day as an independent study exercise.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Sadly, this cannot be done at the present level of technology :).

Jul 11, 2011, My First Professional Game Design

The main mark of a profession is that it is something one gets paid for doing. There are, of course, other considerations to the concept of professionalism, but I won't go into them here.

For years . . . decades, actually, I have been telling people my first professional game design was the board wargame **Eagles**, published in 1974 by **Game Designers' Workshop.** For all that time, I believed this myself, until a period of reflection on the early days of **GDW** revealed the truth.

GDW was formed by a group of college buddies who met over the gaming tables at the **Illinois State University Wargames Club** (*I have forgotten the exact title*). We met in the student union and had an official faculty sponsor (Dr. Southard Modry, bless his soul, of the Geography department, who had an interest in games and the maps they involved. We managed to get some money and immediately blew it on game design supplies: blank hex maps and blank die-cut counters (then available from **SPI, Inc.**). We began making games and showing them off at each weekly meeting of the club.

Eagles began life as one of those games. Eventually, it was published by **GDW** . . . but

it was not my first professional design.

For that, we have to go back to late 1972 and early 1973, when several members of the games club got some state funding for educational experimentation, and formed **Sim-RAD—Simulations Research and Design**—a division of the university designed to create educational games and simulations and put them into the classroom. Frank Chadwick created a simulation of the debate process, Marc Miller created a wargame of the Chaco War for a South American History class, and yours truly created a simulation of the **Salem Witch Trials** for a **Colonial History** class.

Since I received a salary from **SimRAD**, This was my first professional game design.

I regret that all of my notes were lost, and the game has faded into the mists of my memory . . . I do remember that I had arranged for one of the students to actually be a witch, and that student avoided detection by accusing several others, who were then convicted and (presumably) hanged, although there was no sentencing portion of the game. So, what I have been telling people all these years, and firmly believed myself, turns out to be false.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jul 25, 2011, Status Update Jul 2011

Since there have been significant changes in my health status over the past few weeks, it occurred to me that the gentle readers as a whole might be interested. Herewith, a short rundown:

First, I have lost about 25 pounds since March. This is a very good thing, although I can't be too excited about it until I manage to keep the weight off for good. Twenty years ago, I weighed 350 pounds, and about 1995 I managed to get that down to 270 for a while. I went back up to 310 or so shortly after my bypass surgery, and have finally managed to get that down to about 285. I'd like to get down to 220 or so and stay there, even though the insurance actuarial tables say someone of my height should weigh 180. I feel this is ludicrous—at 180 pounds, I'd be little more than a skeleton. This is what I weighed in the 7th grade when I was several inches shorter than my current 6' 3".

Second, I developed a serious infection in my right foot. Tests proved that this had a significant presence of Staphylococcus Aureus, and while this was not the highly dangerous MRSA strain, it was resistant to tetracycline, which I found worrisome.* After several weeks of heavy doses of antibiotics, I finally managed to clear up the infection, and the hole in my right foot shows a) no sign of infection, and b) growth of new skin around the edges of the abscess (which is now considerably smaller than it once was). I need merely keep it clean and dry, and change the dressing several times a day, and things should close up within a few more weeks.

My blood sugar remains under control, and within the levels the doctors want to see it .

I was recently found to be slightly anemic, and began taking an iron supplement on the advice of my doctor. After a few days, I began feeling considerably less tired in the morning, and developed a little more stamina later in the day. I'm still not feeling my old self, but I am making progress toward regaining some of my previous stamina.

All in all, I'm feeling a little better than I did even a few months ago, and I hope I continue to improve over the next few months.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* If the infection got into the bone, I might have needed to have all or part of the foot amputated. Had it gotten into the lymphatic system, or into the bloodstream, I might have to lose the leg. In an extreme case, I might have died. *S. aureus* is one of the micro-organisms that can develop into necrotizing fasciitis, the so-called flesh-eating bacteria and there's no way to make that sound like a good thing.

Aug 08, 2011, Some Helpful Hints on Designing Games

This subject has been delved into deeply by far more capable designers than I*—nevertheless, I thought people might find some of my techniques of interest.

My earliest experience with design was with board wargames, but I never really did enough of those to gain any great facility at the art—I only had three published, and one of those (**Caesar's Legions** for **Avalon Hill)** was an expansion of another (**Eagles** for **GDW**). I designed three more that never saw print, and started several that were never completed for one reason or another. At **GDW,** I was discouraged from designing because the powers-that-were discovered I could develop three products in the time it took me to design one, and three had a better effect on the company's bottom line than one.

I try to do an outline, for several reasons. The main is that it helps keep the work on track if you know where you're going—you waste less time puttering around with false starts and the like. I don't always succeed, and the primary reason is that I want to get at the design as soon as possible. Having an arrangement like a contract that requires an outline to get paid the advance is a good thing in that it forces you to do the ground work instead of just diving in headfirst. I always have a very good excuse for not wanting to do an outline, and it always proves to be faulty in retrospect.

If I am having a problem with the mechanics of a rule, I have found it useful from time to time to see how other people have dealt with the same question. Finding out what has already been done helps me to figure out whether what I am doing to solve the problem is new and unique or just the same old trick that's been tried before.

I have to fight writer's block almost constantly. Whatever it is I am working on, I always want to be working on something else. Frank Chadwick (one of the finest game designers in the world, and from whom I learned a great deal about design) told me that he had a similar problem, and that his method of dealing with it was to always have six projects (or more) going at once, so that he could drop work on one when he became bored with it and jump to another. I never found this technique to work satisfactorily for me, but others may find it helpful.

What I found works for me is to try to set aside a given time each week (each day is better, but life sometimes intervenes and makes this impossible) to work on a game. Sit down at the computer and don't move from that spot until you have types something on the screen. In my case, once I manage to get the words flowing, I have to keep going, because if I stop to get the phone, the door, or to answer the call of nature immediately, I might not be able to get things started again.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Steve Jackson, in **Game Design Vol. 1: Theory and Practice**, for one. These folks, also. I suspect that you can find several more with a little effort.

Aug 22, 2011, The Future Is Already Yesterday

Thanks to the generosity of a fan, I recently received a boxed set of the B**ack to the Future 25th Anniversary Trilogy** on DVD. Shortly after its arrival, I spent a weekend watching the movies back- to-back* and noticed that the future of the movies is the year 2015.

2015? Thats four years away. Hmmm . . . let me add an exclamation point to that sentence: Thats four years away! Still no flying cars, no hoverboards, no rehydrated pizzas, no weather control—and the **Cubs** are no closer to winning the World Series. I think there are probably nostalgia restaurants such as the **Café Eighties**, but if you shotgun enough predictions around, you're bound to hit on at least one.**

The first thing the writers and producers of the three movies will tell you, however, was that they weren't trying to predict the future in any realistic way. They were simply trying to tell an interesting and entertaining story, and I (for one) think they succeeded admirably.

People occasionally criticize **Traveller** because it is not an accurate prediction of the future (not even close), and the creators of the game have the same defense: we were trying to make a good game, not predict the future. And I think we also succeeded admirably well. Look at the other SF games of the same vintage as **Traveller** and find those that are still in print, that are still being played nearly 40 years later—and in many cases played by the same people. I know of many fans who play with their fathers, and several who play with their grandfathers as well.

Traveller (as I remarked may years ago) remains the premiere science fiction roleplaying game. Not because it was the first (it wasn't), but because it became the standard against which all others are measured. Thats quite an accomplishment, and I think its equally cool to predicting hoverboards or 3D shark movies.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Sort of a Back-to-Back-to- **Back to The Future** marathon.
** The basic principal of psychic charlatans for centuries, but that's a story for another time.

Sep 05, 2011, Pets In Space

Some years ago, I chanced upon a book called **The Canine Clan** which was an examination of humanity's fascination with dogs. About a third of the book, however, was devoted to the evolutionary history of dogs and their cousins (wolves, foxes, dingoes, and so on). One subject the author discussed that stuck with me over the years was the human tendency to choose pets from the order carnivora—"ornamental carnivores," he called them.* Not only dogs and other canines, but cats, weasels, and ferrets as well. If they were less ill-suited to domestication, the author felt that humans would have domesticated lions, tigers, bears, and wolverines as well.

I'm not an animal person myself.** This makes me rather unusual, I know, but there you have it. Anyway, one of the things we never got around to detailing in the official **Traveller** rules was pets in the far future. Why this should be has always been a slight mystery. Marc and Frank were both cat fanciers, and Frank had a great lummox of a Saint Bernard named Waldo for a time. Waldo was largely unsuited to urban life, and was eventually sent to live out his days with Winston Hamilton, a close friend of Frank and the rest of **GDW**,

who had a rural property more suited to a large (and slightly clumsy) dog.

The only SF dog **GDW** ever created, to the best of my memory, was Sasha the Mine Dog in the boardgame **Asteroid**. Fans have filled in the gap over the years, most recently Mark Gellis' articles on dogs and cats in the Third Imperium. The "ship's cat" has a long history in SF literature (and in reality as well—their propensity to capture small rodents (when they feel like it) makes them well-suited to ocean-going vessels. SF authors had a tendency to imbue their felines with psionic powers. I remember a series of SF juveniles from my elementary school days about a space traveler and his (eventually psionic) cat, and the novels of Andre Norton were filled with psionic animals of all sorts.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I passed the title on to others at **GDW,** and Dave Nilsen was especially struck with the poetry of the phrase, and included it in several things he later wrote.

** I like other people's cats/dogs, but I like them to go home when I'm through playing with them. Most other pets either puzzle me (why anyone would keep livestock—I'm looking at you folks with pot-bellied pigs here—as pets is beyond me) or disgust me (reptiles, insects, and arachnids fill me with a sense of loathing).

Sep 19, 2011, Small Adjustments

From time to time, I look back. One of the things I've concluded over the years is that things haven't really changed as much as many people would like to think.

I recently saw a television show titled **Life On Mars**, watching both the American remake and (courtesy of the local **PBS** affiliate) the UK original. I usually like original programs better in a situation like this, but in this case I found both versions equally enjoyable, for different reasons. I won't go into the details of the differences between the two shows, but basically the plot in both involves a police detective who finds himself transported back in time to the early 1970s, and has a little trouble adjusting to the way things work. He doesn't have a cell phone, there is no such thing as a personal computer or an internet, and some telephones still have dials. The title reflects his confusion in his new surroundings—it is almost as if he finds himself on a different planet, as the hero says in a voiceover at the beginning of each episode. He has all the usual time travel adventures, including potential paradox-inducing incidents as encountering his parents and his younger self. All in all, however, despite the vast differences in some things, I notice that he rapidly adjusts to the new situation, and generally finds that working as a cop is the same job in the past as he did in the future (he just has to make do without DNA testing, fingerprint scanners, and computer crime databases). The biggest annoyance, it would seem to me, would be having to write reports on a non-electric typewriter (a manual as they used to call them) with carbon paper.*

The upshot of all of this is that people don't really change their basic motivations all that much, and this is one of the reasons why I think **Traveller** has managed to remain so popular over the decades: **Traveller** says that people are still people, even thousands of years in the future.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Anybody remember carbon paper?

Oct 03, 2011, Robots 2011

A few years ago, I had the pleasure of watching a production of Karel Capek's play **R.U.R**. at **ChiCon** (what the **World Science Fiction Convention** is called when its in Chicago). This performance was especially meaningful to me because my brother, John Wiseman, was the director. My brother directed an English version of the play (which was originally written in Czech) and the program included a short history of the play and an explanation of the fact that the word robot comes from a Czech word meaning worker and that those appearing in the play were closer to androids or clones rather than metallic humanoids that people have come to expect.*

Traveller contained no rules for robots in its original version, but this was such a glaring omission for an SF game that one of the first issues of the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** contained a three part series on robots. Later on, **Book 8: Robots** would go into the subject in more detail.

I don't know why it was that Marc decided to leave robots out of the original rules, unless it was for reasons of space (which was limited in the original little black books). Frank would later opine that artificial intelligences were doomed to go mad (for intricate reasons which I will not go into here) and did not include them in **2300 AD** for that reason.

I grant you that robots were more comic relief at the time of **Travellers** initial release: for every movie like **Demon Seed** there were clowns like C3PO and the robot from **Lost in Space**. Perhaps to us, in the late 1970s, we did not really take robots seriously, at least not as player characters.

My brother's production received a standing ovation from the audience, which included Fred Pohl and several other professional SF writers.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The play is kind of a downer because the robots rebel and wipe out humanity, but the ending is hopeful I won't spoil it for you, but it is fairly easy to find on the internet, so those of you who want to find out can do so with a little work.

Oct 17, 2011, *Vive le Difference!*

One of the features of refereeing **Traveller** is the large number of worlds that must be created. Players expect to explore different societies and cultures as they travel through the game universe, and it is the referee/umpire/gamemaster/tinpot deity who must come up with them all.

This requires a great deal of creative work, and it can be the death of a campaign (and doesn't do the GM any good either) if the referee tries to carry it to extremes. It is difficult to create even one fully realized society, and **Traveller** campaigns can require dozens. There are a number of "shortcuts" that can help prevent premature creative burn-out in the referee:

The first tip is not to try to create a new society from the ground up. It is not necessary for every aspect of a world to be different from the Imperial norm—merely a few major aspects of the culture. For example, the culture might be slightly xenophobic, and distrust or dislike strangers. A certain amount of interaction with outsiders is necessary, however, so

you could have all such actions handled by a special caste of the population. The adventurers will encounter problems if they try to conduct business with non-caste members. Nothing dangerous, it's just that things will be rushed because the locals will want to minimize contact with "outsiders" and speed through negotiations . . . with the possibility of misunderstandings and omissions at every step.

Another possibility is to combine aspects of known societies with aspects of another. There are so many societies on Earth (both now and in the past) that interesting "blends" can be created.

Whatever the case, the referee needs to create a "*we're not in Kansas any more*" feeling.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I was originally going to say "*one of the problems of refereeing **Traveller***" but the number and variety of worlds in the game is one of the attractive aspects of the game for many people.

Oct 31, 2011, Allergies

The price of a lot of foods is about to go up, precipitously in some cases. Because of the weather over the summer the US peanut harvest has been especially poor this year, and the price of things like peanut butter (a staple of large numbers of school lunches) may rise by 40 percent or more. The various news reports on the crop shortfall have emphasized that while a portion of children in the USA are allergic to peanuts, the majority of them consume enormous amounts of the sticky stuff annually. Adults eat it also, and one of the most common snacks carried to combat low blood sugar by diabetics are prepackaged peanut-butter-and-crackers (my backpack often contains several, just in case).

A year or so ago, I ran across a report about a food used to combat malnutrition among underprivileged children in Africa, a peanut product named "**Plumpy-Nut**" (my memory of the spelling may be off a little). Essentially a vitamin-fortified peanut butter with powdered milk mixed in, it has the advantage of being cheap (cow's milk and peanuts are staple crops in many African countries, and American companies donate the vitamin powder used to supplement the stuff) and easily mixed on hand-cranked equipment. Provided in jars and handy plastic tubes, I saw lots of film footage of little tykes sucking the stuff down by the pound, and it has evidently saved thousands of kids from starving. The milk protein and vitamins prevent malnutrition during the vital first 2-3 years of childhood, and the peanut butter provides fats and sugars as well as no small amount of protein as well. The stuff doesn't require refrigeration and can be prepared locally, so it doesn't have a huge transport cost associated with it (unlike food aid from the US and Europe).

My sister, who was watching the program with me, wondered why the stuff wasn't being produced in the US when the TV reporter asked that very question. US companies, it seems, are afraid of being sued by the parents of children allergic to peanuts and/or milk. When the reporter asked if allergies had been a problem in Africa, the people involved in the program remarked that they couldn't remember a single case of an allergic reaction.

A little investigation revealed that food allergies are vastly more common in the USA than in other countries, and are even on the rise here. The reasons are not completely clear, but one group feels that American children have been sheltered from exposure to potential allergens and their systems have been "weakened" somehow.

I leave the **Traveller** applications as an exercise to the reader.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Nov 14, 2011, Oddments

First, a short announcement: **TNS** returned last week, and will be uploading every other week instead of weekly, for the time being at least.

Many years ago, when I finally ended up living on my own (sans parents or roommates), I discovered the truth of the phone always rings when you're in the shower syndrome. For those of you who don't know, this is where the victim hears the phone ring while in the shower, but when you get to the phone (often wrapped in a towel and dripping wet) it has stopped. My voracious reading finally revealed the real reason behind this phenomenon: when in the shower, the human mind expects the phone (or doorbell) to ring. Any sound at the edge of perception is transformed by the mind into a ringing bell—since that's what you expect to hear, thats what you do hear. When I bought an answering machine, I discovered that the explanation was true . . . the machine showed that no one had called.*

Lately, I've been noticing an updated version of the phenomenon connected with my cell phone. I often set it on vibrate as a courtesy to folks around me, and I have found that I am experiencing ghost vibrations in the phone, especially when on the bus. I am pretty sure that what is happening is that natural vibrations from the vehicle are being interpreted by my mind as the stronger vibrations of the ringing phone. Has anyone else experienced anything like this, I wonder? My efforts at **Google** have proven fruitless, but I haven't been pursuing the matter with any vigor.

The reason for this is that I have been having trouble pursuing anything at the computer with vigor. The only chairs that I own that are suitable for my computer desk are a bit too low for me to occupy for any length of time. Indeed, the only chair I can sit in comfortably for any length of time is the recliner in my living room, which is totally unsuitable for use with a computer. If I sit for too long in the computer chair, my legs will lock up, sometimes painfully so, and make standing up a problem. Remaining seated in too cramped a posture also results in discomfort (and eventually pain).

In other health news: I am having trouble losing weight. A detailed perusal of the literature included with my insulin reveals that one of the side effects of injecting insulin is weight gain. I find it tiring to walk any great distance without sitting for a few minutes, and my back begins to act up after too long a walk (this is nothing new . . . I have had sporadic back pains for decades). The excess weight keeps me from getting my blood pressure down to proper levels, and that remains a matter of concern for me.

Lastly, the abscess on my foot remains, albeit shrunken in diameter. Readers may remember my problems with cellulitis, a skin infection to which diabetics are prone. Mine has gone from being a hole 3/4" in diameter to less than 1/8, but remains stubbornly persistent about not vanishing entirely. I need to clean it out and change the dressing several times daily.

On the other hand, I have been doing well in my blood sugar levels, which is good in its own way. If I can just drop 50 pounds or so without having anything amputated . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Well, it was either subliminal sounds being interpreted as rings or the notion that someone was ringing my phone while I was in the shower and hanging up before the machine could pick up. I'm a little paranoid, but not that much.

Nov 28, 2011, Five Traveller TV Series

One of the popular pastimes among **Traveller** fans is to imagine what actors would be cast in making a **Traveller** movie . . . I prefer to engage in a slightly different wish fulfillment daydream, and try to think of parts of the game that would make good television shows.

A TV series needs several things: good writing, good acting, good directing, and a science fiction series needs good SFX. You can get by with substandard performance on one of these things if all the rest are superior. It is a rare series that does not have a core of characters that things revolve around (although a good writer/director combination can get by with guest stars every week, in a show like **The Twilight Zone**). Herewith I present the parts of **Traveller** that could be turned into superior TV science fiction:

Free Trader: This would be set on a free trader traveling from star to star in pursuit of profits.* Nuff said.

Explorers: This would be a series depicting the adventures of an IISS scout ship (or perhaps a Scout cruiser if an ensemble cast is desired). A series like this has all the advantages of Star Trek in its various incarnations, and shares the potential disadvantage of being seen as a rip-off.

The Interstellar Wars: This one would follow a series of characters (and their descendants) through the Interstellar wars era, each season being a generation in the history of that conflict. The same actors could play the role of one character in one season, and then play that characters descendant in the next season. This has the potential for vast scope as well as focusing on one or two low level characters, and the editor thinks it is one of the more interesting concepts from a creative point of view.

Cleon II: The adventures of Cleon II as he travels the universe acting as a one man fire brigade. This could be done completely serious, or with a touch of comedy (Didn't you used to be the Emperor?

Yes.

Why'd you give it up?

I didn't like my picture on the money.). Again, this is one of the more interesting possibilities, and could be done with a small or a large cast, as desired.

Frontier War: The crew of a warship during one of the frontier wars with the Zhodani. This could be done like **Space: Above and Beyond, Star Wars** or any one of a number of military SF backgrounds. It could even be done on several levels at once, with a large cast or small..

Anybody in Hollywood who decides to take these on, I'd like to be given the opportunity to write scripts for any or all of them. :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are those who would argue that Joss Whedon's **Firefly** has done this one already. In any case, any attempt to do something similar would be considered to be copying that series by reviewers and viewers alike.

Dec 12, 2011, Nerds Now Kewl

A few years ago, I noticed that something the experts had never thought would happen had indeed happened: Boxers* were cool. Boxers had been the official nerd underwear for decades, and now they were in the number one spot. There are several theories** but it is irrelevant except in that it gives me an introduction to my main point.

Nerds are now cool.

In the early days of RPGs (roughly 1975-1985), those of us in the gaming business could see that RPGs were going to be a minor success, but were never going to hit it big (we would be proven wrong about this, but that's a matter for another time). By "hit it big" we meant that none of us were going to hit Warren Buffet levels of financial success, but it would be possible to earn a comfortable living. At the same time this was going on, there was rising concern about the bad press that games, especially **Dungeons & Dragons**, were receiving . . . about the only time RPGs received any attention from the media it was in connection with a murder or suicide. The main reason for this was that parents, reporters, and journalists were unfamiliar with RPGs, and tended to view them as some strange social aberration. The movers and shakers in the business spent a lot of time discussing the matter, and decided that as RPGs became more familiar, and (more to the point) as gamers began to age out of their teens and twenties, reporters and newsmen would not see them as strange.

As the years went by, there were fewer and fewer deaths attributed to RPGs as they became familiar to the people writing the stories. By the early 1990s, RPGs finally did become mainstream (although it was computer RPGs that first made the leap).

As John Kovalic pointed in his 1000th **Dork Tower** comic strip, RPGs are now sexy (compare and contrast with the first strip, known as the "**Hey Marcia**!" strip). TV shows focusing on nerds are riotously successful (**The Big Bang Theory** and **The Guild** being the most recent examples, and nerds are no longer the outcasts they once were.

Things are better for nerds than they used to be. There are many theories, but I don't really care about them very much either.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The undergarment, not the dog breed or the *Marquis* **of Queensbury** sort.
** I'm assuming there are several theories—I don't really care one way or the other, but there are almost always several theories to explain an given phenomenon and I have to assume that is the case with underwear choice.

Dec 26, 2011, Lessons From The Past

The study of history can teach you many things, mostly that sometimes the past is very similar to the present, and sometimes vastly different, and occasionally both at the same time. Consider the **Big Band** era melody **Cocktails for Two,** written by Arthur Johnston and Sam Coslow for a 1934 movie called **Murder at the Vanities** and later performed by such luminaries as Duke Ellington, Bing Crosby, and Tommy Dorsey (if you don't know who these guys were, **Google** them . . . it will be very educational). The some was a celebration of the newfound freedom to drink available after Prohibition was repealed in 1933.* The introduction states "Oh what delight to/be given the right to/be carefree and gay once again . . ." and goes on to describe a scene where two lovers met over drinks at "some secluded rendezvous." The song is most famous these days for the parody version done in 1944 by **Spike Jones and His City Slickers**, a band who specialized in comic versions of all sorts of melodies.

I listened to this song for years without noticing something very interesting, however: One verse says: "As we enjoy a cigarette/to some exquisite *chansonette*/two hands are sure to shyly meet beneath the *serviette* . . ."

OK, a show of hands please: who knows what a "serviette" is? What about a "*chansonette*"? These are two terms not in common use anymore, but evidently Johnston and Coslow expected their audience to be familiar with them. What does this say about the level of edu-

cation of the radio audiences in the 1930s and 1940s? What does it say about the tendency of the English language to hijack words from other languages (my favorite quote on the subject is by James Nicoll: ("*On occasion, English has pursued other languages down alleyways to beat them unconscious and rifle their pockets for new vocabulary*"). How many radio listeners today know what these two words are? I had to dredge up the few French words I know to remember that "*chanson*" is "song" (as in the **Chanson du Roland**) and "*-ette*" is an ending indicating "small or little" so a *chansonette* is a little song, a ditty.

The level of education expected of the so-called "gentlemen farmers" of the colonial period in American history is kind of sobering. John Adams, who had something to do with starting the American Revolution, wrote in one of his dairies of a days work, which consisted of a list of the various chores he had done (he and his hired workers . . . Adams lived in Massachusetts and owned no slaves) over the 14 hours of daylight, and then noted that after dinner he "translated two more pages of **Justinian**" (!) He doesn't mention it anywhere I can find, but since Adams was also a lawyer, I presume he was translating the law codes of the Roman/Byzantine Emperor Justinian, which were written in Greek, either because he could not get a translation into English, or because he did not trust the ones he could get.

How many farmer/lawyers do you know? How many of them read and write classical Greek?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* If fact, the repeal of Prohibition meant that alcoholic beverages became harder to get—during Prohibition, booze was illegal in itself, so the people selling it were not required to check Ids for underage drinkers, or refuse to serve women or the clearly intoxicated. There were no regulations about how long speakeasies (illegal bars) could remain open, so many of them operated constantly. Basically, if you had money and knew the right people, you could get a drink anywhere and anytime.

2012

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Jan 09, 2012, The Little Things

For most GMs, one of the fun aspects of making the **Traveller** background seem authentically "futuristic" is deciding how much to make the society of the future different from present day Earth. Quite a bit can be accomplished by a few carefully chosen things that culture in question does differently, reinforcing the "*we're not in Kansas anymore*" feeling. Modern society is not all that monolithic, and even in the society of present day Earth there are quite a few little details that strike some of us as odd.*

One item that arouses my curiosity is how people will make notes in the far future? Will there be notepads and pencils, and pens (either fiber-tip or ballpoint)? The Romans used to use wax slates a needle-like metal stylus—and they were pretty much the earliest culture that had a wide enough spread of literacy to make note-writing worthwhile (archeological excavations of Roman-era sites are full of laundry lists and kitchen inventories and schoolwork. Electronic things like PDAs, cell-phones, and the like have begun to replace paper-and-pencils, but there are still plenty of the latter to be found.

I sometimes wonder if refrigerator doors will one day be manufactured to record digital artwork by the family's children, and if macaroni will survive as an art material after it vanishes from kitchens everywhere. High-end "fridges"already have computer chips in them to keep inventory of the contents, and the widespread use of RFID chips will replace the need to check the milk to make sure it hasn't gone bad.

Digital cameras (in and out of cell-phones) have largely replaced picture postcards, and one can still find disposable cameras for sale, even though it is almost impossible to find some place to get the resulting pictures developed (**Kodak** doesn't develop film any more . . . they don't even make film any more, although they are doing a land-office business in photo paper and printers).

I find it interesting that one can still buy wooden toothpicks, despite the attempts of many companies to replace them with various plastic designs. I wonder if expense or simply tradition is the reason?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* During a recent visit, my sister Linda and I were watching a British-import comedy show called **Doc Martin**, about a London surgeon who finds himself serving as a doctor in a Cornish fishing port. After watching a couple of episodes, my sister indicated by some of her comments that she thought the show was set in the 1940s. I asked her why, and she explained that everything looked so old. "They have cell phones." I said, "and computers . . ." and the cars are definitely contemporary, albeit not the same designs as US models. I remarked that many of the buildings date from before 1900, but this is also true of many buildings in the cities and towns of the Eastern US. She was used to living in a midwestern US suburb, in a subdivision that dated from the 1970s, which colored her notions of what a house should look like. It also transpired that the streets were much narrower than she was used to.

Jan 23, 2012, Some News of Interest to Traveller Players

News Release: **Traveller AR MMORPG** Now in Open Beta for **iPhone, iPad** and **iTouch**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: AUSTIN, TX—January 17, 2012—**ingZ, Inc.,** an Austin-based mobile software development company, announced today that **Traveller AR**, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (**MMORPG**), is now in open beta for the **iPhone, iPad,** and **iTouch**. **Traveller AR** is available for a limited time to open beta players at the **Apple Appstore**.

During the open beta period, **ingZ, Inc**. is load testing server architecture and future scalability before a staged world-wide release of the full-featured game. Players who download **Traveller AR** are encouraged to provide feedback to **ingZ, Inc**. regarding **Traveller** AR's features and playability through the **Traveller AR** forum and built-in app feedback form.

"One of the game design features of **Traveller AR** that we've spent a lot of time figuring out, is how to create a true three dimensional sand box in space, where players can go any distance in any direction, and getting the scale right so you truly feel the vastness of space. I don't think any game has come close to what we've done with the look and feel of **Traveller AR**, certainly not on mobile. We have also done a lot of work on our dynamic galactic economy and how to allow maximum player interaction and original player generated content into the game. We are excited to put this system out there for our open beta players to test and look forward to their feedback," said Tony Howlett, President of **ingZ, Inc**.

This highly anticipated release makes available the classic space-based role-playing game, **Traveller,** on an online electronic platform. **Traveller AR** utilizes nearly 35 years of science fiction history and game development that the original game provides. **Traveller** was created in 1977 by Marc Miller, who has been involved from the beginning.

Traveller AR Features:

Become instantly immersed in the beautiful and deadly augmented reality of deep space. Explore galaxies as you achieve new ranks, trophies and levels for you and your ship. Engage in exciting PvP or PvE battles or simply explore and trade for infinite replay-ability. Over 40,000 star systems fully explorable in three dimensions.

Portal-View TechnologyTM lets you augment the reality around you, just as if you were looking out the portal of a real spaceship.

The Nav-WheelTM interface lets you play tactically and intuitively without getting in the way of the action.

Availability:

Traveller AR is in open beta for a limited time for the **iPhone, iPad** and **iTouch**.

About **ingZ, Inc: ngZ, Inc**. is a mobile software development company that was founded to help smartphone users share knowledge and experiences with each other. Based in Austin, Texas, **ingZ** makes some of the world's deepest and most engrossing smartphone applications. Other **ingZ** apps include t**ouringZ, Tour Guide Tool**, and **Dominoes 42-3D.** For more information, please visit *www.ingz-inc.com*.

I had the great pleasure of seeing a preliminary version of this at the **2011 SXSW Technology Expo** in Austin and had a great time crashing the system.* If I had an **iPhone,** I'd be on this in a shot!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I managed to crash my **Beowulf** into the **Regina Highport** and saw a wonderful view of the inside of the facility until the program crashed about half a second later.

Feb 06, 2012, Non-Pets on Starships

The subject of pets on starships has been discussed many times. Things don't always go as we plan, and it is not too far of a stretch to speculate on the types of animals that might make the trip to space without human assistance.

It is not much of a stretch to postulate that rats and mice will travel to other worlds along with humanity. It is pretty hard to keep the critters out of most human habitations, and they have proven very hard to exterminate on this world—it does not strain my credulity too much to have them make the journey to the stars. People keep rats and mice as pets, and escapes are always possible, but feral muroids might manage to get to space . . . all those ship's cats will need a reason for their existence, right?

Smaller vermin will be harder to exclude, since their eggs and larvae are very small and can survive exposure to all sorts of harsh environmental conditions. Bedbugs, in the United States at least, have developed resistances to most pesticides, and it has reached the point where the only way to guarantee their demise is prolonged exposure to live steam. Gats, midges, no-see-ums, mosquitoes, fleas, lice, and sundry sorts of biting and stinging flies are also possibilities from humanity's homeworld alone*—the mind boggles what kind of pests might be found in the 11,000 worlds of the Imperium.

Most vermin carry disease(s) and some of them are actually deadly in one way or another. A very interesting adventure might incorporate the discovery that the ship's cat has killed and partly eaten some hideous (but rather small) monstrosity, leaving the crew to puzzle out exactly what it is, and what connection it has to the epidemic and deadly disease that infected the passengers just after the ship entered jump.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* GMs should consult the wildlife of Australia for nightmarish critters if their players have become jaded by "ordinary" pests like brown recluse spiders.

Feb 20, 2012, Flop Space: The Hotelry Frontier

I originally intended to use the word hostelry in the title, but force of habit made me type hotel and add -ry to it, and I decided not to change it . . . after all, how many of the readers know what a hostel is?* Anyway, finding a place to stay in the far future could present more of a challenge than a lot of players expect.

Starports presumably have hotel rooms adequate to house the average expected transient population, but sometimes things aren't average. In Austin, Texas, for example, **SXSW** (**South-by-Southwest**) absorbs every available hotel/motel/spare bedroom/backyard campsite/storeroom- over-a-garage and cardboard-box-under-an-overpass in town. People can earn $150+ per night renting spare bedrooms to event attendees, and some people boast of living out of their cars. A similar situation occurs wherever the **Superbowl** ends up locating in any given year, and major conventions, happenings, and gatherings of all sorts can overwhelm local resources.

Outside of the extrality line, all sorts of conditions might apply. If the adventurers find themselves in the back country of a lo-pop world, and are not able to camp out for whatever reason (most groups I've encountered, being cheapskates, are used to living in their star-

ship) might have to avail themselves of something less comfortable than a contemporary hotel room.

The Bed-and-Breakfast started life as a family home where the children had left the nest and mom and pop rented their rooms out to travelers for a day or two, providing a breakfast and a place to sleep. Bathing and toilet facilities were often communal** In times past, families finding themselves with surplus bedrooms often started what were called rooming or boarding houses (in American movies, traditionally run by the widowed Mrs. Murphy) and providing more meals than breakfast (as immortalized in song *There is a boarding house, far far away, where they serve ham and eggs, three times a day . . .*).

An extreme situation occurred in and around Washington DC, during WWII, when thousands of military and civilian workers had to be accommodated suddenly and without warning.

In some parts of the world, there are places called youth hostels that specialize in travelers on a budget, and provide mass sleeping space (a room full of cots, not always segregated by gender), bathing and laundry facilities (at extra cost) and cheap meals of variable quality. The difference between a youth hostel and a flophouse was more often in the cleanliness and overall safety (flophouses tending to specialize in sailors/soldiers/day laborers sleeping off a night on the town, a *clientele* not especially concerned with niceties).

A rather unusual place to stay are coffin hotels as described in **GURPS Traveller Starports** but inspired by prototypes in Japan. Some pubs in the UK rent small rooms especially in small towns and villages (even today, if British TV shows are to be believed).

History is filled with more extreme examples, such as the places in Victorian London where sleeping drunks were, for a small sum, hung like laundry on ropes strung at about armpit-height, which strikes me as one of the most uncomfortable sleeping arrangements available.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* * Actually, probably a great number . . . hostel is in fairly common use outside of the US, and shows up within it from time to time. Youth Hostels are common in Europe, and you can find them in the US as well. Flop space is more problematic ... I haven't heard anyone use the phrase flop space or flophouse in quite some time --"crash" seems to have replaced it: Can I crash on your couch? or I need a place to crash.

**Travelers planning to stay in B&Bs and not wanting to share a tub with the other guests should look for the phrase *en suite*.

Mar 05, 2012, Thirty-Five Years and Counting

Here's the really strange thing about **Traveller**: it was Marc's first roleplaying game design. It was **GDW**'s second published roleplaying game.* Marc had designed several published board wargame designs by 1977, and a number of classroom simulations that had some relationship to roleplaying (including one of the US Election of 1896). **GDW** was sure that RPGs would remain a sideline, and we all continued to focus our main attention on our main products, board wargames and tabletop miniatures rules. A few supplements appeared, mostly some subjects that Marc and Frank had not been able to fully develop by the time of Traveller's publication in the summer of 1977.

Marc had ideas for other RPG designs, and was working on them while designing other projects when **GDW** made an interesting discovery: Game sales showed a typical pattern when graphed—a huge initial bump that gradually trailed off (in a pattern similar

to the so-called long tail), but when a supplement to a roleplaying game was published, its sales caused a slight jump in the sales of the basic rules—one that leveled off fairly soon, but never dropped as low as its original sales curve. Sales of the basic game were helped by each supplement, and the effect continued for quite a long time.

Once we realized this, Marc began focusing his attention on **Traveller** products, and laid out a plan to produce something for the game at regular intervals. Plans for other RPGs were shelved in favor of priming the pump for **Traveller,** and it soon began to be reflected in increasingly larger print runs for the basic rules (as documented by the sales figures Marc has published in **Far Future Enterprises Big Floppy Books**), **GDW** sold its millionth **Traveller** item in the early 1980s, and the large print runs caused the warehouse some problems in assembling all of them. There were times when the warehouse crew devoted eight hours a day, five days a week to putting books 1, 2, and 3 into the little black boxes, shrink-wrapping the results, and sealing them up in cartons of six. The part-time workers (mostly college students) we hired to do the work began to feel a little like the **Red Queen in Wonderland**—running at top speed to stay in the same place.

We solved the problem thanks to the county's **Occupational Development Center.** The **ODC** was an agency devoted to giving the disabled useful work, and **Traveller** was ideal for them. Open the box, put one of each book inside (each one helpfully labeled **Book One, Book Two,** and **Book Three**), and close the box. We had the components shipped directly from the printer to the ODC, and they assembled them and sent them to us. Half the assembly workers salary was provided by the state and federal government as part of a workfare program, and the rest was paid by **GDW**, but we got a tax break because we were helping the otherwise unemployable, and the quality was as good or better than the student labor provided. All we had to do was shrink-wrap the assembled games and put them into cartons.

By the late 1980s, **GDW** had begun producing other RPGs and their sales were comparable to **Travellers . . . Twilight: 2000** sold 70,000 copies in its first year. I'm not sure who said it, but one of us (Marc, Frank, my humble self, or John Harshman) remarked that the really good games (**D&D, Traveller, Call of Cthulhu, Twilight: 2000** and so on, would go on pretty much forever, even if they went out of print because there would always be a small fan base that would play them even if they couldn't buy new products.

This was not completely correct, but it is interesting to note that every **GDW** roleplaying game is still available or about to be reprinted by a new publisher. Not bad for three-and-a-half decades.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* ***En Garde!*** was **GDW**s first, and was published within a year of the appearance of **Dungeons & Dragons**.

Mar 19, 2012, In Memoriam: Greg Novak

I recently learned of the death of a friend, Greg Novak (his obituary can be found here and a summary of his gaming vitae here—I refer those interested in such things, and save this space to reminiscing about the good times had on the tabletop). Greg and I were coworkers for a time at **GDW** (he worked at our warehouse one summer—his job as school librarian left him with his summers free, and he wanted to supplement his salary as well as be involved in the gaming industry. Greg was a game designer for GDW and other companies, and wrote board games and miniatures rules as well as books on military and gaming subjects. Greg was a voracious reader, and had eclectic interests. He specialized in the

American Civil War and the Spanish-American War (he considered the latter poorly represented in wargaming), but he found time to write and game on a wide range of topics. I lost track of Greg after I moved to Texas from Illinois in 1998, but some of my greatest gaming experiences were in games or campaigns he ran or organized. Here are a few that will serve as a representative sample:

The Hereros: This was a one off game of a hypothetical encounter between an African tribe and the German colonial forces in German Southwest Africa (present day Namibia) ca. 1902. The battle was a fairly straightforward colonial miniatures encounter, with one major exception: Greg had a surprise for the players of both sides. Before the game, as part of a prepared briefing, Greg passed out a short summary of the goals for both sides (the Germans had to destroy a native village, **the Hereros** had to get their cattle and families away before the Germans could capture them). Both sides got a combined weaponry chart, listing spears, melee weapons of various sorts, single shot breechloading rifles and bolt-action magazine rifles, along with the ranges and effectiveness of all of them. We, the Germans, assumed we had the best guns, and began laying plans accordingly. The surprise was that the best rifles were in the hands of the natives (who had thoughtfully amassed them before beginning their revolt) not the German Schutzetruppen. The German plan (taking advantage of our imagined superior weaponry) to destroy the natives at long range was thereby scuppered, and we got our heads handed to us (sadly for the Hereros, they lost badly in the long run.)

The Village: As referee for a continuing series of games of **Charlie Company** (a game of his own design), Greg followed his firmly-held philosophy that it was not necessary for the ref to introduce "the fog of war" into games . . . given enough people, the players will introduce that themselves. As a platoon leader in one game, I and my men were to secure a village. One of my squad leaders decided the safest way to clean the place out was to toss smoke grenades into several of the "hooches" (huts). Sadly, these were not more or less harmless smoke grenades, but WP (white phosphorus), and the hooches were instantly spattered with fragments of burning white phosphorus, and set ablaze.* This is the only wargame where I or soldiers under my command committed a war crime. Greg decided not to game out the court-martial.

The Hot LZ: Another incident in a different game of **Charlie Company** resulted in a massacre. My squad was to helicopter into a LZ (landing zone) and scout it out, prior to the rest of the company landing. We encountered stiff resistance, which killed my radio operator and (more important) destroyed his radio. Several of the soldiers in the squad were players, and one of them decided to cover our retreat from the ambush zone using (you guessed it) a smoke grenade. This was, however, a colored smoke grenade . . . a green one, which was to be used as a signal that the LZ was not dangerous and the rest of the helicopters could land. The result was a very interesting game, but was also an unqualified massacre.

The games Greg conducted were almost always interesting, and were often part of a campaign, a connected series of battles involving political and economic as well as military considerations. I regret not keeping in touch with Greg and the rest of the **Central Illinois Tabletop Warriors** (the games club he helped found). He will be missed.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* White phosphorus fragments burn so hot they can extract oxygen from water and most organic compounds (including human flesh) and are very, very difficult to extinguish. The recommended technique in the field is to dig the fragments out with a knife, which can be rather uncomfortable for all concerned.

Apr 02, 2012, Back to the Future*

Before we get down to the meat of this editorial, I'd like to mention an animal from Mark Gellis' **Desert Flora and Fauna** article, the borrowing shrieker.**

Anyway, down to the news: This coming weekend, I will be in Edinburgh, Scotland as a guest at the **Conpulsion 2012 Gaming Convention**, to be held in T**eviot Row House Students Union**, Bristo Square, Edinburgh. The venue reminds me of **Hogwarts** in some ways—mainly because it has been built and rebuilt about a zillion times, and has a myriad little rooms that seem to shift around at random, plus staircases that change direction while you are using them. And a bar in the library . . . or a library in the bar, I'm not sure which. And a bar in the basement (the one with the library). And a bar in the loft. I had a glorious time the last time I was there, and I plan on repeating that experience despite the fact that I can no longer make full use of the bar(s) because of my medical condition (soft drinks and water this time, sorry guys, but you can still buy me a round of the curious local non-alcoholic beverage, I'll miss the single malts most of all).

One reason I'm titling this expedition **Back to the Future** is that one of the things I hope to accomplish there is to relocate the blue police telephone box I stumbled across last time in the hopes that my cameo appearance on **Dr Who** can be expedited (I am in lust with the actress who plays Amy but who isn't?). I hope to turn this into appearances on every other kewl SF series that originates in the UK.

And **Doc Martin** if that can be arranged, but I think they've stopped production on that one. After that, maybe I can do **The Guild, The Big Bang Theory**, and get a part as a guest corpse on **NCIS.**

If you are within **J-1 of Scotland t**his weekend, I hope to see you there!

The other reason I call it **Back to the Future**: The UK is six hours ahead of Texas, and are thus in the future from my point of view . . . very Einsteinian. OK, maybe not so much.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I am not referring to the 1980s movie trilogy in this title (I am referring to it in this footnote, however), which I consider to be one of the funniest and most entertaining SF movies ever made (despite several plot holes, and the fact that Marty's girlfriend changes appearance between the first movie and the last two).

** This name reminded me of something I hadn't thought of in a long time: a short comedy skit my younger brother worked out about an animal called a greech (the language may have varied I was in the 6th grade at the time):

Mr. Interlocutor: I say, Mr. Bones . . .

Mr. Bones: Yes, Mr. Interlocutor . . .

Mr. Interlocutor: What is that odd looking creature you have there?

Mr. Bones: It is called a greech, Mr. Interlocutor.

Mr. Interlocutor: What an odd name . . . tell me, why is it called a greech, (reaches out) and why does it have a muzzle?

Mr. Bones: DON'T TOUCH THAT!

The Greech: (l*oud, high and piercing)* GRE-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-CH!

Mr. Interlocutor: (*Quickly replacing the muzzle*) Never mind.

Apr 16, 2012, A Few Things . . . 2

I recently returned from a guest spot at the **ConPulsion 2012 Convention**, and I have to say I had a great time, with one small exception.*

I got to see the fortress site the Romans named **Arbeia** located near Newcastle. I was unable to unload the coal I brought there, thus proving an old saying.

What I found most interesting about the building reconstructions at **Arbeia** was to compare the barracks block to the commanders quarters. The barracks block had eight sets of double rooms, into which a hearth, a small grindstone, cooking implements, and eight soldiers plus their equipment were settled for years on end. The archeologists can't say for certain what the internal arrangements were, and can't even give a definitive answer to the question of bunks, single cots, or just mattresses on the floor? I suspect that after a short time, any reasonable group of soldiers quartered in the same place would have found something better than sleeping on the cold floor, so count me among those who approve of the bunks or cots reconstructors.

Higher up the food chain, the centurion in charge had a two-bedroom flat with a separate kitchen and sitting room. The bedroom as restored by the museum was about the same size as my own . .. although my kitchen is bigger :)

The greatest jaw-dropper, however, was the commandant's house. The full outline is laid out on the ground, with bricks and blocks but the left side is reconstructed, which is an inspired way to do things since the quarters are patterned on a typical Roman upper class house, with the atrium pool, a central colonnaded garden, two dining rooms (one summer one winter) and a private bath, along with several rooms around the edges. Aside from the porters room by the door, the use to which the smaller rooms were put is a matter for speculation, but one large room was restored as the commanders bedroom, one as a sitting room/solar for his wife, several storerooms, a kitchen and pantry, and one room restored as an office. The museum staff has even tried to decorate the walls as closely as possible to resemble patches of painted plaster found on the site. Several of the rooms had arrangements for a type of under-the-floor heating, which would have been a very attractive feature to an officer from a Mediterranean climate stationed in Britannia.

The overall effect is quite impressive, even more so, in my opinion, than the restored stone gatehouse that is shown in every photographic collection of the site. I urge anyone who is interested in military history to give it a look if fortune happens to bring you near the site.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I had a urinary tract infection develop while I was out of the country, which interfered with my sleep and thus sapped my energy, but I got some antibiotics upon returning and things are clearing up. Now I just have to deal with the underlying cause, which means I need to find a urologist who is also a **Traveller** fan :)

Apr 30, 2012, A Little Self Examination

In several of my previous editorials, I have examined various aspects of fandom especially as it relates to roleplaying games. Most of my experience with fans has been from the standpoint of a professional game designer, but I have never really related my experiences as a fan. It is quite common for professionals in one industry to be devoted fans of pros in some other industry (I have witnessed several cases of this over the years), and even for the same industry. I will not embarrass the people I know well by telling tales, except that

it can be amusing to watch two pros go all fanboy on each other. The main reason I do not reveal these stories is for the simple reason that I have made a fool of myself in public often enough for the subjects of the tales to gain revenge by telling equally embarrassing stories about me. Nuff said?

As a demonstration of my own geeking out, I offer the following: I was a great fan of SF author L. Sprague De Camp, and read large numbers of his books with great relish. When I was a teenager, I had a paper route that happened to include the home of SF writer/personality Wilson Bob Tucker, but I never really considered the possibility that the local celebrity might be acquainted with one of my idols.* One weekend, while collecting the fees due me for a weeks deliveries, I knocked at the Tucker's door and L Sprague De Camp (whose picture I had seen on book dust jackets for years) answered. I stood there stunned, unable to say anything but a kind of weak stammering semi-vocalization I was to encounter many times in years to come, but addressed at myself. Finally, Mr. Tucker called from inside the house Its my paper boy, Sprague, Give I'm fifty cents will ya? Mr. De Camp fumbled in his pocket, came up with two quarters, handed them to me, and closed the door. I went through the rest of the day's collections in a fog so deep I didn't even keep the coins separate from the rest.

I was to attend many conventions over the years, and eventually met most of the authors I idolized. I quickly overcame my fan-boy behavior, and even managed to thank Mr. De Camp for the years of entertainment his work had provided me.

I didn't have the courage to ask if he remembered the earlier incident.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The fact that the local library had a rather extensive collection of science fiction books, some of them autographed, might have clued me in, had I not been a total idiot when I was 15 years old.

May 14, 2012, The Big Three Five

Traveller is thirty-five years old this year. Don't ask me what day—I don't even remember the day we decided was the official release date. Marc usually says the date of the first sale at **Origins 77**, and that is as good a day as any, I suppose. Whatever date one decides upon, the game is now older than a fair number of its fans. It is now old enough to run for president or for the US Senate, if only it met the other requirements (the game was printed in the USA, but does not meet the other qualifications for candidacy, although the **US Constitution** doesn't specifically state that a candidate has to be human.*

The game is continually growing (some would even use the word mutating) and is (or was) available in several languages and even more editions, including numerous rules variants and a choice of milieus. It is one of the few games to have achieved a fame all its own—when I was introduced to actor/author Wil Wheaton, for example, his first statement was (words to the effect) I don't play the game myself, but I have friends who do so religiously. Even among non-gamers, the game is recognized.

I can't speak for Marc, Frank, or the other designers and contributors to the game, but I can say that the game has made it possible for me to experience a large number of things I could not otherwise have done:

I have met a large number of intelligent, enthusiastic fans, including actors, writers, movie and television personalities, and minor and major celebrities, including some of the best game designers in the world. I have a much wider circle of friends directly as a result

of **Traveller**.

I have been to places I would probably not otherwise have seen, and I have done things I am sure I would not have done if not for **Traveller.**

Many fans have written to tell me that I have changed their lives for the better. Parents have told me that their children became interested in science, history, literature, and astronomy as a direct result of playing Traveller. Several authors have been inspired to create as a result of playing **Traveller.** Fans have been inspired to create artwork that lead directly to careers as professional artists.

Seeing all of this as a direct result of the game I had a part in creating gives me a warm feeling inside, and all I can say in response is I'm glad to have made peoples lives better in some small way—you have all given me three and a half decades of great adventures, and I hope to carry on doing so for another 35 years.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Or even that they be sentient, for that matter, although there is a strong implication that being alive is required.

May 28, 2012, Some Things Its Better Not To Know

Over the years, I have discovered that there are a number of things I have painstakingly learned as a gamer (board-, tabletop miniatures-, and roleplaying-) that, when in some parts of polite society, it is better not to know. At least, many people seem to prefer that I not know them, and it is sometimes better for my continued good health that I appear ignorant.

When I moved to Texas, someone asked me if I knew any Spanish. I replied that I knew a number of things that had been yelled at me over the years that it was better I should pretend not to understand. I can curse like a sailor in several languages, but I have been trying to cut back in recent years.* Profanity, I think, has become all too common these days, and overuse has dulled its value. I also refrain from using certain Spanish insults, for fear of setting off the verbal equivalent of global thermonuclear war.

Overfamiliarity with certain songs can lead to embarrassing situations. As a tabletop wargamer, it is usually considered acceptable to hum a WWII German march while moving one's troops over the tabletop, and being able to distinguish *Wir Bomben Auf Engeland* from the *Horst Wessel Leid* in casual conversation is a valuable talent. At most other times, however, being familiar with such melodies is a social disadvantage, unless you are among film fans discussing the *Die Wacht am Rhein* versus *La Marseillaise scene* from the movie *Casablanca.* An overfamiliarity with military songs of other eras can also be a setback. Once, at a college party, I was subjected to a mix of scorn and admiration for my ability to sing seven or eight verses of **The British Grenadiers** while drunk (I only know four verses when sober).

Occasionally, I recognize a tune from my gaming past being used in situations totally separated from its origins. A modern commercial for pressure-treated lumber created a commercial involving a tavern scene from the old west, and the tune being played in the background was **Marching Through Georgia**, a melody that used to arouse strong emotions among southerners, especially Georgians in days gone by.

Recently, on a TV show involving lawyers in a bar, I heard another melody which I recognized as **Lilliburlero** (which has a long history with numerous lyrics, including being used as an anti-Catholic anthem, the theme of the **BBC**, and the **March of the British Army Royal Engineers**), being played in the background in a classical tempo by a couple

of violins.

I usually resist calling things like this to the attention of my companions, unless I'm sure they will appreciate the knowledge, and not think me to be some kind of crackpot.**

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Even though I feel, like Mark Twain, that in many trying situations, profanity can provide a relief denied even to prayer.

** Many of my friends will hasten to add at this point that for me, it is too late.

Jun 11, 2012, Andre Norton and My Father

It was only a few years ago that I discovered that SF author Andre Norton and my father, Clifford Wiseman, were both born in the same year—my father on May 27 and Ms. Norton (born Alice Marie Norton) on February 17. Other than sharing a birth year, both of them had little else in common, except for having a major effect on my life.

Ms. Norton took the pen-name Andre Alice Norton (along with a couple of others) because publishers told her the main audience for SF and fantasy fiction was male, and they didn't think a female author would sell in her chosen market. As it turned out, she produced an enormous number of books, short stories, and anthologies on SF, fantasy, and historical subjects, setting a standard few could surpass. Her works blazed trails for many others to follow, and inspired many game designers in addition to SF&F authors. Many of the earliest books I read were by Andre Norton, and I came to believe that the name was a pen name used by several authors . . . no one could write so many titles, I (mistakenly) believed. One of many regrets in my life is that I never got to meet her in person (although she did answer one of my fan letters).

My father was not an author, but was a voracious reader. He liked Westerns, especially the novels of Zane Grey and had a huge collection. He also read action/adventure stories of the sort now known as Pulp but my mother insisted he get rid of the magazines after they fell apart.* Most of the surviving books (hardbound) were donated to the local public library, so I did manage to read them (I did not develop as great an interest in westerns as he did). The most enduring aspect of my fathers personality is brought to mind whenever I try to walk past a penny on the street—his ghost appears and insists that I return and pick it up. My younger brother confesses this happens to him as well, but he only picks them up if the coins are heads up (and if they are not, he turns them over, announces loudly Hey! A penny . . . and its heads up.) My father had an enduring interest in history, and was interested in electronics and technology (he taught himself to repair radios, TV sets, clocks and watches, eventually branching out to small appliances – mainly because his parsimonious nature didn't allow him to pay someone to repair something he could fix himself). I gave up trying to fix watches after my first tentative foray into the art resulted in an explosion of clock parts in all directions after I attempted to dismantle an alarm clock without taking the tension off the mainspring (this was discouraging in the extreme), but I did inherit a need to create things that manifested itself in building model planes, ships, and tanks, as well as miniature wargaming. I never heard a discouraging word about my choice of game design as a career, even though he didn't really understand role-playing games, he was proud of the fact that I was earning a living by writing.

He also had more than a casual interest in the space program, and would, under pressure, admit to having read a little of that Buck Rogers stuff in the distant past. He never smoked, drank, or cursed (all of which I have to admit I indulged in at times past). I wish I

had inherited his ability at mathematics and his almost eidetic memory. He was a **Masonic Grand Lecturer** for the State of Illinois, and as such could recite the **Masonic Catechism,** a body of work consisting of several hundred thousand words. He could remember almost any phone number or street address, sometimes from more than five decades in the past.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Since pulp magazines tended to be cheaply printed and bound, the items in my fathers collection had vanished before I was old enough to read them, another part of my past I regret.

Jun 25, 2012, Tomorrow's Antiques

There are some things that just aren't around any more. When I was a kid, half dollar coins were pretty common, and I gathered bags full of them when I was collecting for my paper route the fee was $0.45 for years, and eventually went up to $0.50, both of which were handled nicely by the half dollar coin. The most common version had Benjamin Franklin on the front (the obverse, in numismatic parlance). This was replaced in the id-1960s by the Kennedy half dollar, which was a bimetallic sandwich coin, containing no silver. For some reason, vending machines of the 1960s and after didn't accept half dollar coins, and they soon became scarce. The older, silver alloy coins left circulation as the price of silver rose, and never returned. You can still get the Kennedy coins from the mint and from coin shops.

There are a number of things from my youth that are gone, or effectively so. Do any of you remember typewriters? I had two until I moved from Illinois to Texas—they got lost in the move, along with a few other things. They used to be a vital tool in the writers toolchest, but word processors killed them in the 1980s, and to see one now, you have to go to an antique store, museums, storage room, or closet. I'm not sure if **SJ Games** still has one . . . they used to, but I haven't seen it in years, and it could have been disposed of years ago without anyone caring much. The last thing they were useful for was filling out carbon paper multipart forms, but those are on the museum shelf next to the typewriters these days. **Rolodexes** and business cards are doomed, but may hang on for a while before joining typewriters.

How many of you remember dot-matrix printers? I still have two, tucked away in the spare bedroom my brother calls the elephants graveyard of consumer electronics. Telephone directories are pretty much gone . . . I still get a **Yellow Pages** delivered by **AT&T** every year, but I haven't seen a white pages in years. Both books are handled by the internet these days. Printed encyclopedias are in used book stores, and printed books are headed there within a few decades, except for a few stalwarts such as myself (and Id have an e-reader if I could afford it*). Bus/subway tokens are pretty much gone, and paper transfers vanished from **Austin's Capital Metropolitan Transit Authority** years ago, replaced by cards with mag strips. Most banks have done away with deposit slips. Film cameras are largely gone, replaced by electronic ones (the only film cameras left are disposable ones from the supermarket, but good luck finding a place to develop the film).

Cash has been on the wane for years. I used to carry a $100 or more with me, but now I have a few coins and a debit card. Incandescent lightbulbs are vanishing (and will soon be illegal), home phones and answering machines are so 20th century (and I still have one of each, although I finally began using a cell phone a few years ago (got one for my birthday). Physical media like floppies, CDs, thumb drives, and such are being replaced by something called a cloud (which I eventually figured out was a virtual server accessed through the internet why is it nobody ever explains things like that?).

Snail mail is effectively doomed, but that may take a few more years before vanishing completely. Gasoline pumps and filling stations are going to take longer to vanish into the Smithsonian, where electronic cars are sending them.

I hope my musings have given you some idea of what to invest in so you can corner the market on the next big collectible craze.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'd like a **Nook** if anyone has one they can spare me :)

Jul 09, 2012, More About the Future

My comments in last issues **FTM** about cornering the market on the next collectible craze inspired some other thoughts how hard it is to predict the future.

SF authors have been writing about the future for over a hundred years* and their level of accuracy is not quite as good as the weather bureaus, but is not too bad, overall. Isaac Asimov once said that he had a better average than most, but only because he had written so much that some of his wild stories had to be close to the mark. Robert Heinlein's description of waterbeds in several of his stories, for example, were close enough that the **US Patent and Trademark Office** refused another inventors patent application on the grounds that Heinlein had described it decades earlier, in what is called prior art.

Several authors described space stations, space colonies, lunar landings, and planetary exploration missions, and by using what is known as the shotgun technique (blasting out clouds of details), managed to hit one or two that turned out correct.

Of course, SF writers aren't really in the business of predicting the future accurately. They are in the business of telling a good story. In order to do this, they have to (in part, at least) describe their future well enough so people believe in it. They have to make the future seem alien and different, yet at the same time make it familiar enough so that the readers can submerge themselves in whats happening.

A lot of the time this involves some minor thing tossed out to show that the readers aren't in a familiar world anymore (represented by the phrase "*We're Not in Kansas Anymore*"). An example of this from the movie **Demolition Man**, where we learn that toilet paper has been replaced by three seashells with no other details given. I can testify from personal experience (from the RPG end of the creative spectrum) that sometimes a great deal of thought is given to the details and implications of a particular throwaway, but, more often than not, these little things are tossed off with little consideration of their long term affects.

In movies, sometimes these things are added by the director, or by the set designer or the property masters, with little or no consultation with the screenwriter. In television (or lower budget movies) things are often added because they are less expensive than what the writer or the director had in mind, or because they happened to be readily available from some other production.

Sometimes these things come back to bite us creative folks, but usually not. It is necessary to create so many things, often in a very short time, that no time is available for working out the long-term changes to society some little thing will have. If we were to work everything out in the same level of detail that we need to give the big stuff, the project (game book, movie, story, TV episode, or whatever) would never get done, and thats not a path to success in any industry.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The precise time depends on what you mean by science fiction and who you consider the first SF writer to be. Cases can be made for a number of authors, but the discussion is not really suitable for a footnote, so I'll leave it for another time.

Jul 23, 2012, Sundries

I learned with regret today that Sally Ride, America's first female astronaut, died recently of pancreatic cancer. I was mildly surprised to learn that she was 61, the same age as me. I am getting used to celebrities my age or younger passing this veil of tears, but it still takes a little getting used to. We at **GDW** followed Ms. Ride's career with some interest, as all of us were supporters of women's rights, but especially Marc, who was a long-time member of **NOW, the National Organization for Women. GDW**'s designers went to great lengths to allow for female characters in RPGs that were something more than damsels in distress. We eventually established that a major duchy in the **Spinward Marches** sector was a matriarchy.

For those interested in my health, I continue to recover from my heart attack, and am struggling to get my weight and blood pressure down to levels my doctor approves of. Money is still tight, and I am still battling a general feeling of tiredness that makes it hard for me to face up to exercise on some days. My morale was recently boosted by an all expense paid trip to Scotland as a guest of **Conpulsion**, a gaming con in Edinburgh (where I finally learned the correct pronunciation of the city's name). Thanks again for having me over, folks, and for showing me the various old Roman stuff you guys keep around so casually* I only wish you could persuade the inhabitants of the apartment complex overlying the unexcavated portion of the fort to allow the rest of the place to be dug up and reconstructed.

June 22 was the 35th anniversary of **Traveller**, this being the day the game first went on sale at the 1977 **Origins Gaming Convention.** We chose this day as the official birthday, a few weeks after the event, because we couldn't remember when the various components arrived from the printer, and when we passed out the first copies to employees. The first public sale was at **Origins,** because we weren't able to get enough assembled to ship to distributors in time.

Later On, we would make sure that a game would arrive in time to be shipped to distributors so that they could send it to stores by the same day it went on sale at the con. We did not always manage this, but we tried, because store owners like it when their non-convention attending customers can buy the game through them and don't feel they have to go to a con to get the latest games.

I hope everyone had a good summer, and is not too dismayed that it is almost over by now. They seemed to be almost forever when I was younger, and I could almost forget that I had to go to school less than two months after July 4th.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* While seeking directions to one ancient site, we discovered that none of the staff at the train station knew there was a Roman fort less than a mile away, until one of them noticed the large street sign directing visitors to **Arbeia Roman Fort**, which turned out to be located next to the **Emperor Hadrian Elementary School** (Hadrian being the Emperor who ordered the fort built, as well as the fortification known as **Hadrian's Wall**).

Aug 01, 2012, Daydreams

Here are a few projects I think about from time to time that do not have a prayer of coming to pass (unless I win $200,000,000 in the lotto or become the adopted son of an internet billionaire *).

Graphic Novel—**WWII From the Soviet Perspective**: There are a lot of really cool stories of WWII from the Soviet side, and I'd like to do something to bring these heroics to a wider audience without seeming to glorify Communism or Stalin. I got the idea from seeing an RPG based on the **Red Star** graphic novels and hundreds of conversations with Frank Chadwick (my old boss at **GDW** and a great enthusiast of the Eastern Front), as well as the experiences of a chemistry professor at **Illinois State University** who fought with the anti-German partisans from the age of 12. The project would require an artist with a great enthusiasm for WWII military history, a huge pile of money for funding, and storylines covering several different points of view. Among the stories I'd like to tell are these:

Several storylines covering the partisans, including a Soviet soldier cut off from his lines during the German initial advance in 1941, and a civilian child who watches his family get killed and takes up arms. A Soviet officer caught up in the pre-war purges and sent to Siberia, only to be brought back because his military talents are needed.

A member of the **Night Witches,** a unit of women pilots who fly dangerous bombing missions at night, on obsolete aircraft without radar or night vision technology. One story of this unit tells of how an aircraft iced up to such an extent that the bombs froze in their racks, and a crewmember had to crawl out on the wing and knock them loose with a hammer(!?!).

A woman fighter pilot. Frank had a story about a German ace shot down near a Soviet airfield who, after his capture) asked to meet the man who did it. Upon being introduced to the woman who shot him down, he expressed disbelief (and, evidently, scorn). The woman then proceeded to describe the firefight in exact detail, and according to witnesses, the German got more and more depressed with each passing moment.

Civilian factory workers fighting on the front lines during the Siege of Leningrad, in a T-34 tank they themselves built and drove from the factory into battle.

Numerous others, too many to mention

Film/Video/TV: Everybody with an IQ in three digits is either working an a screenplay, gave up working on a screenplay, or thought about working on a screenplay at some time in the past (I qualify for all three). Here are a few of my notions that haven't been mentioned elsewhere:

A TV series/movie/internet video series about an aging game designer who ends up running a comic/game store, keeping the secret that in the back of the store is a portal to the distant future which served as the inspiration for his former best-seller RPG series (based on no one we know). Hilarity would ensue (in typical "fish out of water" fashion) when the future government discovers the portal and sends agents back to explore the past without changing the future. Much.

Another series involving the adventures of the crew of an interstellar tramp steamer (which I began working on long before **Firefly,** btw). Enough said about this one.

A series set in the 1950s, detailing the adventures of a studio making a **Space Cadet/ Spaceship X-1/Commando Cody Serial**, with lots of behind the scenes comedy involving doing cheesy special effects on the cheap (this one was inspired by a syndicated series called **Remember WENN.** An adaptation of [insert name of **GDW** RPG here] as a movie/TV series. Like this hasn't occurred to almost every fan.

Of course, for any of this to come to pass, I have to actually buy a lottery ticket. Or

find the winning ticket on the street (which, statistically, is only a slightly greater miracle.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I have a greater chance of getting hit by lightning . . . twice . . . within 30 seconds.

Aug 20, 2012, You Can('t) Go Home Again

There is an old saying to the effect that you can't go home again. I have always interpreted this to be a variation on the saying attributed to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man. .*

Recently, due to the generosity of friends and relatives, I had the opportunity to attend a family reunion in southern Illinois, an event I had not attended in about a decade. At the same time, I arranged to meet with my old **GDW** partners (Marc Miller, Frank Chadwick, and Rich Banner) over lunch. I visited my parent's gravesite, saw my old elementary and high schools, and took a short ride past my parents old house, now owned by someone else.

Despite my resolution not to discuss business with my old friends, I did a little, and managed to get some good news I won't go into right now. I discovered I really miss just talking with those guys, the conversation ranging over a wide variety of topics in the three or four hours we had before the restaurant staff began to look at us funny.

My parents' gravesite was well trimmed, but none of us have been able to put flowers there for Memorial Day in a couple of years. My sister and next older brother live closest, but they are both about 70+ miles away, and it is not always convenient to make the drive. The old home town had changed so much I almost got lost. The trees are vastly larger, many are gone, replaced with others, and several buildings nearby to the house I grew up in are gone or changed. I almost didn't recognize the house, the new owners had put in a new porch, planted new shrubbery and (in a step that angered me a little) ripped out my mothers rosebushes. The maple tree in the back yard that served as home base for backyard softball games is now 50+ feet tall, and the vegetable garden replaced with a second house, fenced off. The garage my father built was still there, but needs a coat of paint and new shingles.

Both the elementary school and the high school I attended have doubled in size, and have been rebuilt extensively. I bought a soda at a gas station in what used to be a field more than 300 yards outside the city limits. The newspaper I used to deliver is little more than an advertising sheet now, averaging less than 10 pages per issue.

The building that used to house the **GDW** offices is still there, occupied by several small office rentals now. The sign was taken down and went to a store owner in Missouri (I think named **Medieval Starship**, but don't quote me on that). The basement barbershop next door is still in business, under new ownership, but with some of the same barbers as before. There is a convention hotel complex in the downtown, and the Normal Theater is still there, where I took my first date so many years ago (and where SF author Wilson Tucker was a projectionist), still a wonder of art deco architecture.

I concluded that one can go home again, despite the fact that both home and I have changed radically sometimes, it can be a little depressing, but in my visit I had a great time, because even though a lot of the buildings are different, most of the people are the same.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Determined to prove his master false, one of Heraclitus' students tried to step into the same river twice. He put his foot into the river, and ran a little bit downstream, stepping again, but not quite in the same place. Frustrated, he tried again, and still didn't quite make it. He kept on running and stepping, running and stepping, running and stepping, until eventually he fell into the Aegean Sea and drowned. Being a philosophy student used to be considerably more dangerous than it is now.

Sep 03, 2012, More Assorted What-Have-You

My last editorial about visiting home struck a chord with several readers, and I thought I'd expand a little on some of the thing that happened on that trip, as well as touching on a couple of other things that have been buzzing around my head lately.

One of the things I got to do this year was visit one of my uncles on my mothers side . . . I knew he was a guitar player and music enthusiast, but not the details on his most prized possession. He had served in the military during WWII, and when he got out decided to buy himself a little gift: a first year of production **Gibson Les Paul Guitar.** I don't know if you know anything about electric guitars (I don't know that much) but my brother told me this is like owning a **Stradivarius Violin**. My uncle offered to let my brother and myself play it, but I was too scared to even touch it, especially after I discovered that even in slightly worn condition (my uncle has played it regularly since 1952), it is probably worth $50-$70,000.

My uncle and aunt live in a farmhouse in southern Illinois, and at the last family reunion I attended, I spent the night in one of the upstairs bedrooms (where my cousins grew up), currently used for storage of the pile of old stuff the family accumulated over the years. This included an antique record player so old it used cylindrical records instead of disks. I remember this from hearing it played as a child (the songs included typical **Tin-Pan Alley** hits of the 1910-1915 era). I have no clue what its worth these days it was in pretty bad shape 10 years ago.

Another feature of the old farmhouse was a hummingbird feeder, which my aunt had forgotten to fill the morning we were staying there. This meant that the usual flight of hummingbirds arrived, expecting to be fed, and were disappointed. I watched through the kitchen window as one bird after another arrived, poked around the empty feeder for a few moments, and then flew over to the kitchen window. They hovered in a rapidly growing cloud, flitting around and seeming to say: Hey! Humans . . . where's the food? with an air of increasing menace until my aunt went out and filled the feeder. I was reminded of the scenes in Hitchcock's film **The Birds.**

Something I noticed this trip was the huge fields of wind turbines sprouting across the landscape. This was pleasing to the conservationist in me until I learned that more than half the time, there is not enough wind to make them turn. I stood near a field of three of them near the university's experimental farm* watching the blades turn slowly. This was on a day when there wasn't a whisper of wind . . . I was told the power company uses energy to turn the blades on still days to keep people from asking awkward questions.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The crops were in hideously bad shape due to the drought. The corn looked as bad as corn in Texas looks normally.

Sep 17, 2012, A Couple of Things In Re Sweden

First, some sad news for naval history buffs: the 17th century Swedish warship **Vasa** appears to be deteriorating faster than expected, and the conservators may not be able to slow the decline. I had the immense pleasure of visiting the ship in 1991 while in Sweden as a **GoH** for a SF/Game convention. Visitors had to walk around the outside of the vessel on scaffolding, and could not actually enter the ship (it was too fragile), but several parts of the interior had been duplicated in new material, and were on display. As with most sunken ships, most the artifacts were corroded chunks of metal or sodden wood, although a sizable number pieces of the admiral's porcelain dinner service had survived almost completely intact. **Vasa** had the misfortune to be overloaded with guns (at the insistence of the Swedish king, who was not a naval architect), and thus overturned and sank on her maiden voyage. It was located and raised in 1961, and put on display in Stockholm, where it (for the time being, at least) can still be seen.

My flight from the USA to Sweden was from Chicago, but the aircraft originated in Minneapolis, and was carrying what appeared to be the entire contingent of AFS foreign exchange students from Scandinavia back to their assorted homelands. I was submerged in what appeared to be a sea of blonde, blue-eyed teens who were overjoyed to be going home again, but sad to be leaving the new-made friends and adopted families in America. They were wearing every keepsake they had acquired while in the USA—an eclectic mixture of gigantic belt buckles, Stetson hats, turquoise silver jewelry, and American sports memorabilia of all kinds: team jerseys, ball caps, sweaters, scarves in team colors, and cloisonné© pins of every description . . . everything at once. I had planned to get some sleep on the flight, but the energy level was simply too high.

While in Sweden, first in Stockholm for a tour of **Target Games AB** and the **Vasa Museum**, then in a city called Sundsvall (the site of both the convention and a **UN** clean air conference), I met a large number of locals, all of whom were very anxious to practice their English on me upon discovering I was an American. Swedes get several years of English in school, but they are taught a rather sanitized vocabulary, and wanted to catch up on the latest American slang. I was treated to dinner several times, and once had the interesting dining experience of braised tenderloin of reindeer (I saw it on the menu and thought "When am I ever going to be able to have this again?").

The flight back from Stockholm generated an amusing anecdote. While in line checking in my bags I noticed a young lady in front of me having trouble understanding the Swedish airline clerk (the usual questions: "Is this your luggage? Did you pack it yourself? etc.). The Swede spoke Swedish and English, but no Finnish, and the Finn spoke Finnish and English, but no Swedish. Both had heavy accents, and could not understand each other's English, but I could understand them both, and they, it transpired, could understand me. I ended up translating from English to English, and then from English back to English again. It seemed pretty amusing at the time, and got even funnier in retrospect.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Oct 01, 2012, A Few More Boxes

My two trips to Edinburgh to attend the **Conpulsion Games Convention** have enabled me to check off a number of boxes on my personal To Do List, and I therefore need to replace them. Most of the remaining items are along the lines of visiting extant Roman remains and Roman relics in assorted museums—the main one being the **Roman Wing of the British Museum** and the assorted reconstructions of Roman buildings. Building recon-

structions seems to be all the rage these days, especially of Roman stuff . . . everyone seems to be doing it these days, and it can be most impressive. I'd especially like to visit the museums with the scale models of the cities of 2nd century Rome and 1st century Jerusalem.

Now, to replace some of the checked off boxes, I need to add a few others:

Guest appearances (as myself, preferably) on numerous TV shows, including (but not limited to) **The Big Bang Theory, Doctor Who, The Guild, Red Dwarf** (preferably not the US version, unless the rumors I've heard are NOT true) and Primeval. I am not particularly interested in being a guest corpse on **NCIS**, unless it involves a dream sequence with Abby.

I'd like to actually finish a screenplay someday, and a SF novel ditto (these last are my own getout).

Finally, I think it would be cool beyond measure to get synchronized sleeping made an Olympic event, to be adopted by J. K. Rowling (or at least have her give me a manor house and a monthly stipend to support it properly), and lastly, I want to raise enough money to finance a movie version of the classic painting, **Dogs Playing Poker**.*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Not CGI, stop motion, or animation . . . I want a live action version using real dogs!

Oct 15, 2012, Gold and Lead

Many years ago I noticed several things about wargame designers: those of us who designed board wargames tended to play miniatures games for recreation. Those who designed and manufactured miniatures and wrote the rules for them tended to play board wargames as a hobby. One interesting result of this was that we could trade products with each other . . . I don't think I paid for a single miniature from 1984 to 1994—I got them (and a huge supply of paint and other equipment) all in trade for **GDW** products. I still call myself a leadpusher, even though a lot of the figures are made of pewter these days. Also, I still follow the miniatures industry, even though my active participation in tabletop miniatures gaming has dropped off considerably in recent years.*

The industry has changed radically over the last decade or so, but I remain convinced that miniatures wargamers are in a Golden Age. Never have so many types and varieties of figures been available, never have there been so many rules sets and accessories available, never have there been so many gateways into the hobby for prospective players. An example of the availability of figures: I once thought it would be amusing to conduct a skirmish game set in the Pacific, pitting a tiny force of American and European sailors against a (relatively) large force of Hawaiian islanders. The various sub-groups of Hawaiians would make use of the outlander sailors as mercenaries to operate cannon and muskets to help in the conquest of other subgroups, eventually uniting the islands under a single king (Kamehameha I as it happened). In addition, assorted governments wanted to establish footholds in the islands for mercantile (and other) purposes. I was thwarted in my efforts by the fact that although 18th and 19th Century sailor figures were available in a variety of scales, the only way to get Hawaiians would have been to engage in a large number of conversions (the process of modifying one figure into something different). While I enjoy so-called "one-off" conversions, I did not look forward to the large number of them that would have been necessary. Nowadays, however, a company in Australia now makes a variety of Hawaiian warriors, but my situation does not permit me to finally carry out the campaign.

Technical advances have made it easier to produce both lead and plastic figures, and the number of companies doing so has never been larger. Rules have gone from simple

mimeographed booklets to boxed sets that have never been easier to get into, and still have the attractions of miniatures gaming.

Frankly, things have never been better. It makes me wish I had something to trade . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* There are several reasons for this:

—I moved away from the active wargames cell I participated in for many years when I came to Austin and I never found a new group.

—I had to abandon my gaming table because I couldn't afford to move it to Texas.

—I find my aging eyes make it tougher for me to paint miniatures, especially over the last few years.

Oct 29, 2012, A Few Anniversaries

As I am posting this issue to the Internet, **Tropical-Superstorm/Hurricane Sandy** is roughing up the East Coast of the US from the Carolinas to New England, and has already dropped three feet(!?!) of snow in West Virginia with more to come there and elsewhere. I hope every reader and every one of their family and friends is somewhere warm and dry.

It occurred to me a few weeks ago that as of June 22, 2013, I will have been a professional game designer for 40 years. Actually, my first game design that I got paid for was a few months earlier,* but I have chosen the foundation date of **Game Designers Workshop** instead.** It has been a long, strange trip in the words of the song, but I wouldn't want to have missed a moment of it (except when I paid full price to see **Aliens III**).

The last week or so has been the 50th anniversary of the **Cuban Missile Crisis,** also known as *The Thirteen Days When Civilization Did NOT Get Fried to a Crisp*.

PBS ran several shows commemorating the events, reminding us that the world was saved because President Kennedy did not take vengeance when a US plane was shot down by Cuban SAMs, and a Soviet naval officer named Vasili Arkhipov decided that firing a nuclear torpedo at US ships would be a bad thing.

I was 11 during the events of that time, and remember being a little concerned, especially after practicing hide under your desk drill in school and watching a film called **Duck and Cover,** which has become a cult favorite but wasn't as funny in 1962 as it seems today.

It wasn't until I was a little older that I realized the full ramifications of what we avoided in 1962.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For those keeping score, this was a simulation of the **Salem Witch Trials** for a history class at **Illinois State University**, and was paid for by **SIMRAD (Simulations Research and Design)**, part of **ISU**'s experimental education program.

** The foundation date of **GDW** is also iffy, so we decided to celebrate it on June 22, the date of the invasion of the USSR by Germany in 1941—**GDW**'s first game was ***Drang Nach Osten***, covering the same topic.

Nov 13, 2012, A Slight Delay

I apologize for the slight delay in posting this issue: my phone line went belly-up just as I was starting this week's upload, and I had to take other steps. There is no editorial this time around, I'll make it up next time.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Nov 26, 2012, Adventures in (Old) Technology

I think the readers deserve an explanation for the tardiness of last issue, so here it is. On Monday the 12th of November, my land line stopped working. In fact, it cut me off in the middle of the upload of the **JTAS** and refused to work—instead of a dial tone I got a horrendous buzzing sound. I went to **Illuminati World HQ** on Tuesday, carrying the articles in on a thumb drive, and, borrowing a computer there, uploaded the articles. Problem was, the issue had already uploaded to the web (empty) so we had to find someone with the knowledge to force an upload at an unscheduled time . . . it has been so long since this was necessary, most of the **SJG** IT department had no idea how to accomplish it, and those that did were out of town at the **Boardgame Geek Con** in Dallas, and out of touch. After a sizable delay, the issue was uploaded by a member of **SJ Games** highly competent staff, and life could go on. Part of life going on involved me yelling into my cell phone at a robot.

The **AT&T** customer service phone number is answered by a voice recognition computer program (presumably more efficient/cheaper than the old press 1 for this, press 2 for that menus). After a short conversation with the machine (during which I was less than polite, I fear*), I was connected to another machine, the **AT&T** repair number, which enabled me to file a trouble report but still did not allow me to speak with a living entity.

In the meantime, I discovered several peculiar aspects to the problem. The phone worked/didn't work on a mysteriously predictable schedule: The line dissolved into static about 5 PM each day, and resumed working sometime between 10:00 AM and Noon the next day. When the repair service tested the line, it was in the early afternoon, and it worked perfectly. I finally made contact with a human at the repair center, during the time when the line contained nothing but buzzing static (which I could demonstrate by holding the phone handset up to my cell phone) and managed to convince **AT&T** that a live repairman on site was needed. The first one arrived while I was out, and whatever he did (or didn't do) cleared things up—for 18 hours or so.

After another series of conversations with the repair center, another repairman was dispatched (on Black Friday, when I could be home). An investigation revealed that 1) the phone connections to my apartment were very old, so old that the insulation had rotted off the wires, causing the line to ground out, and 2) this happened when the ambient temperature caused the wires to contract and make contact. As the day warmed up in the morning, the wires were no longer grounded, and the phone began working, but in the cooler temperatures of the evening, the wires again made contact. The repairman replaced the wires leading to my apartment, and everything has worked since.

Every wire in the box leading to my 4-plex had lost insulation. Why did no one else in the building complain about lost phone service?

Possibly, their wires were too far apart to ground out when they contracted. Or possibly, I am the only tenant who still has a land line.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I don't think the program cared, however. It continued to be as patronizing as ever.

Dec 10, 2012, A Matter of Conditioning

The weatherman on one of the local Austin TV stations is originally from northern Michigan, and has trouble suppressing a chuckle sometimes when dealing with what they call cold fronts in Austin, Texas. Moving through tonight is a front which will bring the first freezing weather since February and the other anchor people were joking about getting out the long underwear and dressing in layers. When asked if he was going to wear long johns the Michigander chortled, "*Of course not, those are for when it gets cold.*"

I grew up in central Illinois, where unlike Austin, the first killing freeze comes around Halloween (the temp has already dipped below freezing by then, late October/early November is when the temperature drops low enough and long enough to do in the crops and any trees that haven't gone dormant*). Snow was a common thing in winter (my mother used to say she didn't mind the white Christmases, it was the white Easters that were annoying), and it was not uncommon for a sleet storm to take out the power for days at a time. Temperatures below freezing (32 degrees F, 0 degrees C) often lasted for weeks. In Austin, freezing temperatures are considered a crisis, and temps below 0 degrees F would be a sign of **Armageddon.**

On the other hand, Dave Arneson, one of the creators of roleplaying games, was from Minnesota, and believed that *Ten Below Zero Keeps Out the Riff-Raff.* He would occasionally mock me for wearing a coat when it was "*only a little below zero.*"

One of the main features of **Traveller** games is the differences in climate between many worlds, and how these differences create different cultures. Within certain limits, temperature tolerance is a cultural thing the Inuit are known to strip to the waist and complain of the heat when winter temperatures get above freezing, and Marc Miller once told me that he found temperatures in the 80s intolerably cold for a few weeks after returning from Vietnam in the early 1970s.

People can acclimatize themselves to a wide variety of climates, and can enjoy weather conditions others find intolerable. Perhaps Climate Tolerance should be a part of every characters background story?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* My father used to say it wasn't a killing freeze until the tomato plants in his garden were dead.

Dec 24, 2012, Season's Greetings and All That

Many of you will be reading on Christmas Day, but I wrote it the day before, so I am not actually writing it on the holiday. There are so many holidays this time of year that it is difficult to remember them all. So let me take the time to wish all of you and yours a wonderful (insert the name of the Winter Solstice celebration of your choice) and a happy and prosperous new year (whenever your calendar starts the next year).

Christmas was set in the winter as a political move by the early **Catholic Church** to soften the blow of conversion for the early pagan peasants . . . or not, depending which modern historians you read. In any case, it is highly doubtful that Jesus was born in December, if the event occurred while shepherds were watching their flocks by night. There

was need for a night watch only during lambing time, which is in the Spring. Lambs can't run from predators very well for a few days after being born, so the shepherds stay up to drive the hungry predators away. Any other time, only one or two shepherds need to stand watch all night, as the sheep are pretty good at sounding their own alarms as long as they don't have newborns to worry about.* If you have sheepdogs, pretty much everybody can get a good nights sleep.

Christmas was actually illegal in Massachusetts for many years, and most of the holiday customs we Americans associate with the day derive from Victorian England (who stole a lot of them from Germany and Scandinavia).** Dickens' **A Christmas Carol** was not trying to get people to be less commercial, it was a plea to get people to celebrate the day at all.

I shall be celebrating the holiday in my own way . . . eating turkey and dressing, talking to relatives and friends on the phone or the internet, and watching my Christmas Movie Trilogy: The 1950s Alastair Sim version of **A Christmas Carol, A Christmas Story** (Ralphie's quest for a **Daisy Red Ryder** carbine-action BB gun with a compass in the stock and this thing that tells time), and **Die Hard** (which takes place at Christmas, and has lots of explosions and stuff).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The **Gospels** differ in many details—for example, the shepherds and the wise men appear in two different **Gospels** (look it up . . . research is good for the mind). The books of Mark and John have little if anything to say about the birth. None of them mention the little drummer boy or Rudolf.

** For some reason, we Americans have adopted the British carols of Christmas, but didn't pick up other British customs, such as Christmas Crackers (they aren't saltines—look em up), and the Halloween-like pranks and drunken revels that were the custom in earlier days. A continual annoyance to me is the ludicrous notion of what constitutes a Christmas song. **Jingle Bells,** for example, and **Walking In A Winter Wonderland** are celebrations of winter, not Christmas, and **We Need A Little Christmas** is about celebrating Christmas out of season.

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Jan 07, 2013, Evolutionary Remnants

Going through set-up on the AOL software a short time ago, I found that one of the things the user needs to set is whether or not the phone line is rotary or pulse dial. Instantly the thought occurred to me: are there any interchanges that still use rotary phones. A few moments later, it occurred to me that rotary phones are probably still in use somewhere on the globe—despite the widespread use of cellular technology.

Another conversation occurring not too long ago involved the correct name for the small pocket found inside the right front pocket on a lot of trousers/pants/trews/panta-loons/etc. One party insisted it was properly called a phone pocket, and that the intended use was for cell phones, the other party insisted it was properly a watch pocket. The first party disparaged this notion, asking Who would put their watch in there?

I had to hop in with the observation that the correct name was indeed watch pocket and that there used to be* something called a pocket watch that was intended to be carried therein. The vest in a mans 3-piece suit used to come with two pockets (I have never owned a 3-piece suit so I don't know if they still do or not), one for the pocket watch, usually carried on the right) and the watch fob (usually carried on the left), connected by a light chain (which stretched across the front of the vest and kept the watch from falling to the floor if the user dropped it).

Clothing abounds with such things. Suit coats and sports jackets often have splits up the tail in the back, so they can be more conveniently used when mounted on horseback. Coats and jackets have buttons on the sleeves and sometimes have epaulets—leftovers from the military jackets that inspired their designs. Caps sometimes have rudimentary chin straps that are too short to be of any practical use whatsoever, and are permanently stretched over the bill.

The human body has a number of throwback organs, of which the appendix is one. Its only use these days seems to become infected (appendicitis) and require surgical removal (appendectomy).

A little thought and the readers should be able to add useless things to future clothing styles.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Upon reflection, it occurs to me that pocket watches (and the associated fob and chain are still available in most jewelry stores. My father carried a pocket watch from the 1920s until it stopped working about 1972.**

** The stoppage was because he suffered a vision loss due to diabetic retinopathy, which cost him his close in vision and prevented him from performing maintenance on it. It was then that he actually started using the wristwatch he received on his 35th anniversary as an employee of the **Texaco-Cities Service Pipeline Company**.

Jan 21, 2013, Knowledge

Knowledge is funny. I read a column recently that said the phrase you can't go home again could be translated as you can't give up knowledge. The columnist was writing for a model railroad magazine, and was discussing trees modeling the dense forest canopy of the Appalachians requires different skills than modeling clumps of two or three trees for the Great Plains. A viewer doesn't notice the trees for the forest (to reverse the old saw)—so

the modeler of huge tracts of woods doesn't model very many trees, and modeling the appearance of individual species isn't especially important. However, showing a few trees next to a farmhouse or along a fencerow requires representing the traits of individual species. And, just as all boxcars look pretty much alike until you study them closely, the difference between a maple, an oak, a cedar and an ash is not readily noticeable until you study them. The author* goes on to say that once you study trees closely, maples don't look much like sycamores, and it is impossible to ignore that fact.

With all due respect to the author, I think he is right for some people and wrong for others. I won't give a percentage, as I don't know that there has ever been any sort of survey on this subject, but there are many people who are perfectly capable of forgetting (or ignoring) all sorts of details they consider insignificant or unimportant.

I saw a movie a year or two ago called **The Centurion** which was set in Scotland during the first decades of the 2nd century AD, involving a Roman soldier and his problems with the local lowland tribes at about the time of the building of **Hadrian's Wall**. The Roman governor of Britain in the movie was Julius Agricola, who had been dead for several decades by the time the film was supposed to be taking place. A major part of the plot was a conspiracy involving Agricola's wife, who was called Flavia (it seems all Roman female aristocrats are named Flavia, especially if they are conspirators). We know quite a lot about Agricola, as it happens he was the father-in-law of the Roman historian Tacitus, who wrote a biography that has survived almost intact, and we know when he served as governor and what his wife's name was. I was able to ignore these inconvenient tidbits of information, however, and still enjoy the movie for what it was. Most Roman movies are much more inaccurate by comparison.

I am able to enjoy many movies despite honking plot holes, historical gaffes, and so on simply by pretending that I am watching a fantasy film in no way related to actual history. Sometimes it is the only way to remain sane.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Tony Koester, in the September 2006 issue of **Model Railroader**.

Jan 28, 2013, Robots 2013

First, I need to apologize for the lateness of the last issue. The AI who uploads the magazine is supposed to do it every two weeks, but sometimes it drinks a little too much celebrating New Years Eve, and is still hung over a few weeks later . . . or something, and uploaded everything that was in the queue on January 15th . . . which was nothing, as it was only a week after the previous issue. Anyway, our incredibly competent IT staff forced the issue to upload, but were still not sure whether the next upload will be two weeks after the last one or what. If this issue uploads on the 29th, I'm not going to ask the IT folks to fix it, but just go with the time the AI wants to do it. The IT folks have a lot of stuff to do without having to get the upload back on what is essentially an arbitrary schedule anyway.

Speaking of robots and AI, **60 Minutes** recently ran a news piece about robots and American manufacturing. Seems our metal children are taking over a lot of jobs that few people ever dreamed they'd muscle in on. According to the article, robots work full time, don't take breaks or need to be fed or sleep, and therefore work cheap—the number given in the show was about $3 and change per hour, which is about as cheap as Chinese laborers do, so jobs on American assembly lines are coming back to America (without the time and cost to ship the final product over here from Hong Kong.

Only problem is, the jobs that are coming back are for machines, not people.

AI is also taking over picking and packing in warehouse/shipping facilities (there is some cool video of a giant warehouse that picks, packs, addresses and send out thousands of packages each day, but with only two or three people inside. It was cool watching the little **Roomba**-like critters skittering around like giant horseshoe crabs carrying stacks of bins (or crawling under rows of bins).

Machines are taking over white collar work as well . . . AI is starting to read the mountains of legal documents that, up until now, have been read by (human) legal aides, and there are medical applications as well (it didn't take long to envision little AI carts running around dropping off meal trays and picking up bed pans at hospitals, sweeping up on an industrial scale, and hundreds of other boring, repetitive chores. Food Service. Agricultural labor. More and more stuff that humans don't need to do anymore.

Where does it all end? Is the massive unemployment of the future depicted in **Judge Dredd** the way our future will go?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 11, 2013, Anniversary

As of 22 June 2013, I will have been a professional in the game business for 40 years. Actually, like most historic events, it is a lot more complicated that that:

The date chosen is problematic. The year is probably correct, but it may have been as early as fall of 1972. My first paid game design was an unnamed simulation of the **Salem Witch Trials,** done on salary for **SimRaD (Simulations Research and Design)**, which was funded by educational experimentation funding provided by the State of Illinois Education Department to **Illinois State University** in 1972-1973. **SimRaD's** staff consisted of Frank Chadwick, Marc Miller, P. Rich Banner, and my humble self. The game was sort of role-playing, and sort of historical improvisational theater. It was restricted to the village of Salem, Massachusetts in the late 17th century, and consisted of a single page of very simple rules and a handful of character cards, one for each player. It went along more or less historical lines, and had several people accuse others to divert attention from themselves. The one person whose card said You practice witch-craft was not convicted. Nothing physical is left of the game, as it had only one final copy, and never saw print. Nevertheless, it was my first professional game deign, in that I got paid to design it.

The date of 22 June represents the birthday of **GDW**, which we decided (after the fact) started on 22 June because that was the date Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Since **GDW's** first game was ***Drang Nach Osten*** (later retitled **Fire in The East**), published in 1973, we felt the date was as good as any.

My first game for **GDW** was **Eagles,** a game set on the Rhine frontier between Rome and the German tribes.

The problem was, I wasn't on salary at **GDW** for the first few weeks.*

If this reminds the readers of why July 4th isn't exactly the day the **American Declaration of Independence** was signed, thats because history is sloppy, and tends to happen haphazardly, without regard to clean, convenient calendar dates.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* No one was, actually. All income had to be plowed into growing the business. Our

first warehouse/shipping facility was Frank and Marc's shared two-bedroom apartment, and the first art department was at Rich's house.

Feb 25, 2013, Some Things Ya Just Can't Change

In some ways it is interesting that so many things stay the same over the years (even over the decades). I was watching one of my birthday gifts (Season 2 of **Game of Thrones)** yesterday (the afternoon of **Oscar** Sunday) and while listening to the commentary by George R. R. Martin on the episode he wrote covering the **Siege of Kingsport,** he mentioned that too many of the main characters didn't wear helmets in combat. Mr. Martin has evidently been fighting this particular battle for a long time, as he mentioned it constantly during the episode . . . going so far as to congratulate the one main character who did wear his helmet during the action (or most of it, anyway). Movies and television are famous for being a non-helmet zone . . . major characters almost never wear helmets. Some say this is because they interfere with vision, and make mock battles too dangerous, others say the directors don't like to cover their major actors faces, and some say it is the actors themselves that don't like to cover their faces. About the only time you see a hero wearing a helmet is when the highly-paid actor has been replaced by a stuntman—the mock battles are still dangerous (Mr. Martin mentioned an incident in the filming a TV episode her wrote twenty years ago, where a stuntman had his nose cut off). Naturally, the extras all wear helmets.

For whatever reason, the no helmet rule applies to almost every movie where helmets occur, with the exception of the more modern pictures where helmets cover only the upper part of the head. Gossip held that the reason the powered armor was not included in **Starship Troopers** was that it would cover the actors faces . . . although I think a more likely reason was the trouble and expense of filming powered armor as described in the book would have overwhelmed the films budget.

As far as history is concerned, actual generals wore their helmets most of the time. Julius Caesar is described as wearing a helmet in battle, but also wearing a red cloak so his soldiers could see him on the battlefield (since he wrote the book(s), he was doing the describing, so we may presume* he was telling the truth).

Some directors manage to get around the helmet problem, mostly be doing close-ups that clearly show the actors face. I've even seen one actor remove his helmet, pour water over his head to cool off, and then replace it—clever

Mr. Martin also complained at the lack of budget that prevented the episode from being filmed in the detail he wanted . . . evidently had he achieved his inner vision (as screenwriters say) the episode would have cost as much as the other nine episodes in the season. This is a problem with TV especially, but even so-called epic pictures like **Cleopatra** only have money for a few hundred extras (despite the fact that Elizabeth Taylor/Richard Burton version having the largest budget of any film up to that time), and most of the battle of **Actium's** budget was spent on the sea battle.

As CGI gets cheaper, and actors less vain, perhaps Heinlein's power armor will eventually make it to the screen as its creator intended.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Of course, one should never presume, as that just makes a PRE out of U and . . . hmmmm . . . that joke doesn't quite work, does it.

Mar 11, 2013, Outdated

A year or two ago, I was at dinner with my sister (on one of her annual pilgrimages to Austin to visit her son who works here as a paramedic), my nephew and his girlfriend, when the subject of birthdays came up. My sister reminded all of us that I shared a birthday with Luther Burbank and the Roman Emperor Constantine, and she had always envied me because she had to share a birthday with Adolph Hitler –– April 22. She then said that one of her earliest memories had been when the news spread that Hitler had died. My nephew's girlfriend asked when that was, and while my nephew looked it up on his smartphone, I remarked that it was towards the end of April, 1945, about a week after his birthday, around the 29th. My nephew's online search verified my surmise, and his girlfriend remarked that I had found the answer faster than he could look it up. I said that instead of a smart-phone, I had a brain filled with minor trivia.

Thinking about that condition, it occurred to me that in the absence of the pocket money to buy high tech personal toys, I was better off having the nearly full memory banks, but that my nephew and his 10-year-old daughter would have to substitute the silicon chip toys . . . the modern school system does not encourage memorization of data. It is faster and easier for they (and millions like them) to look things up as they need them.

Despite the handiness of being able to call up facts, I can't help but feel slightly behind the times . . . my memories are aging, and subject to certain critical failures.* I have found the inability to remember the names of people I have known for years (mostly movie actors) most irritating. I can remember the films they have been in, even the names of the characters they played, but their name will sometimes elude me for minutes at a time. This is especially annoying when discussing movies.

The argument is made, why clutter your mind with facts when they are available within seconds at the press of a button. I have only one reason:

Whenever I look something up in printed media—a dictionary, a library shelf, an encyclopedia—I can browse not only the item I am looking for, but the entries on either side. I like perusing library collections because I get to see the volumes nearby to what I am looking for. As a child, I used to spend hours randomly selecting entries in the family encyclopedia and reading them (to the puzzlement of my mother, who thought at first I was reading the whole thing cover-to-cover).

As long as I am unaffected by senile dementia, I can swim in the sea of the knowledge I have collected, without pushing buttons or touching a screen, and I hope that this is never outdated.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Nominal aphasia is one of the—the sudden and baffling inability to remember nouns. I remember this happening to me for the first time at age 16, and it remains equally annoying to the present day.

Mar 25, 2013, Some fiscal Dreamin'

Almost everybody likes to engage in a little harmless fantasizing about what they would do if they hit it really big in a lottery or an inheritance from an unknown uncle on the **Fortune 500** list. Even though the odds of winning the **Powerball** jackpot are astronomical,* theres no harm in a little harmless wish fulfillment dreaming

After I take care of my immediate fiscal needs and pay off my debts, I would spread a little of the wealth to my friends and relatives who have helped me through the rough spots over the years, I'd get down to some entertainment:

* I'd finance a gaming club where I could invite friends to come and play games with me. I'd hire industry bigwigs to come and run games for me. RPGs, tabletop miniatures games, and other things I haven't thought of yet. Maybe build a custom starship bridge deck for me and my bridge crew to fight battles on (complete with things to shake the deck when our ship gets hit, smoke, and sound effects). Even cooler would be to make a mobile unit for travel to conventions, and the like.

* In my new mansion, I'd build a large model railroad layout. I've always had a kind of off-and-on interest in model railroading, but not in certain aspects of the hobby. I could hire people to do the wiring, the design, and the actual construction, but I'd want to build the terrain and buildings myself. I have no interest in the operational aspects of running a miniature economy, so I think what I would do is recreate a segment of a railroad that has gone out of business. I would model a section of a small Midwestern town where most of the track is abandoned or converted to bicycle/hiking paths. The town would have a small switchyard with the former stationhouse converted to a railroad museum with engines and cars on display in the former side spurs. This way I could contrite on the things that interest me most: building structures and scenery, and allowing me to ignore wiring, scheduling, and pretending to be an engineer.

* I would have a small wooded area on the grounds of the mansion, and as entertainment for my younger relatives, I would create a small house out of a large tree stump. This would be a fiberglass replica about two feet high, with a slate roof, a chimney, an old-style door and windows. Inside (barely visible through the tiny curtains) would be rooms with tiny furnishings, and every sign that the place was inhabited. The house itself would be concealed in an out of the way spot, behind bushes and unmown grass. Hidden cameras nearby would record the reactions of visitors. A miniature village would be overkill, I think.

I used to think up practical jokes (pranks, they call them now), but I stopped doing these after my activities almost ended with a friend winding up in a Turkish prison. At that time, I swore off all such activities, and now mere plan them as intellectual exercises.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Evidently they are better than the odds of picking a perfect list of winners for college basketballs **March Madness**, however. My odds of winning the lottery would vastly improve if I bought a ticket, but I figure the odds of finding the winning ticket on the street to be only a slightly greater expenditure of divine miraculous energy.

Apr 08, 2013, Revisiting the Classics

From time to time, I like to re-read my old favorites from among the books in my personal library.* I have no real schedule to this . . . mostly I do it when, for some reason or other, I run across the string of titles on a bookshelf (I tend to organize fiction series by author, then in chronological order by the events depicted in the story, if possible—most of the fiction series I have are historical adventures, and this works best for me). This weekend, for example, I ran across the **Hornblower Novels** of C. S. Forester, and took the stack to my living room chair and vanished into the Napoleonic Wars until Sunday night.

There are many people who consider Forester's **Hornblower Stories** to be the finest adventure fiction ever written. For myself, I consider them among the best etc. There are

others equally good in their own way.** My collection is the series published by **Pinnacle Books** in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and is tattered and torn from massive readings. I made it up to Lord Hornblower before I ran out of weekend.

Other books I read and read again are:

The Flashman Series by George M. Fraser. The first book was inspired by a minor character in a Victorian novel (and totally forgettable work, otherwise) entitled **Tom Browns Schooldays**, and involve the escapades of a cowardly scoundrel who finds himself publicly hailed as a military hero in the 19th century.

The Sharpe Series by Bernard Cornwell, detailing the adventures of a soldier in the British army during the Napoleonic Wars (later expanded to cover earlier and later times). These were made into a TV series as well.

Asimov's **Foundation Trilogy** (I have only the original three: **Foundation, Foundation and Empire,** and **Second Foundation**) . . . I have not read the later additions to the series. Many people consider these to be one of Travellers literary inspiration, and they are right.

The Sergeant Cribb Novels of Peter Lovesey, about a Victorian policeman who is actually employed by **Scotland Yard.** These are an excellent **PBS** series as well.

The Assorted Witch World Novels and story collections by Andre Norton, as well as several other series by her, all of which also helped inspire much about **Traveller**.

I have many other authors I reread from time to time, but I don't usually think of them as forming a series, so I tend not to make marathon sessions out of them.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The disorganized load of literature which dominates every domicile I have lived in since 1966.

** Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey/**Maturin Cycle,** for example . . . I have many of these, but nothing approaching a complete collection, and have yet to read all 20 some-odd titles. My fiscal situation requires me to avail myself of the local public library shelves, and this makes impromptu reading sessions logistically difficult. I mention this only because there is a small core of O'Brian fans who complain bitterly if I mention Forester and omit mentioning O'Brian. The writing styles are different, but both very enjoyable, and the characters interesting, *albeit* O'Brians are more complex.

Apr 22, 2013, Good Stories

Good stories are getting harder and harder to tell.

In no small part, this is because a great many of my best stories took place back in the stone age, as far as most of my co-workers at **SJ Games** are concerned.

For example: I have an anecdote about the former Soviet Army that is moderately funny. After the Soviets experienced a number of expensive (in both lives and treasure) military actions, primarily in Afghanistan, the various subsidiary republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (or USSR, now called the Commonwealth of Independent States, or, more simply, Russia) told Moscow that their soldiers could no longer be deployed outside of Soviet Territory. This meant that the units assigned to East Berlin/East Germany had to be staffed by soldiers from Byelorussia, which placed a bit of a strain on things.

Then, the **Berlin Wall** came down, and East and West Germany were reunified. Until they could be withdrawn, the West German government agreed to take over paying the salaries of Soviet soldiers in what used to be East Berlin/East Germany. In Marks, rather than

Rubles. Thousands of Soviet citizens were to be given large quantities of valuable western currency, not the near worthless, artificially propped-up Soviet money. Marks were widely accepted in most countries, and the Soviet soldiers in Germany spent them on things that were rare (or unavailable) in the USSR. This simple fact of economics had vast repercussions, and the Soviet Union fell apart soon after (although it is difficult to prove any causative link . . . by the time Germany reunified, the USSR and **Warsaw Pact** were doomed, but this event may have hastened things).

In order to tell this amusing anecdote, however, I first have to explain that once there was a Soviet Union, and that Germany used to be split in two, and . . . well, I pretty much have to explain the whole end of the **Cold War**, and my short, amusing anecdote becomes a long, slightly tedious history lecture.

Another involves comedian Dennis Miller's reaction to German Reunification, where he remarks that he views it as he would view a reunion of the duo of (Dean) Martin and (Jerry) Lewis . . . he wasn't interested in any of their previous work, and he isn't interested in seeing anything new by them.

The assignment for this week is to explain why these two stories are funny:
1) One of the crowd at one of Abraham Lincoln's public appearances shouted to him:

Mr. President, you remind me of a horse . . .
What kind? Lincoln replied.
A draft horse!

2) One of Shakespeare's plays has a character that says that by occupation he is a cobbler, because he meddles not with this one, or with that one, but with all.*

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Hint: it is a pun.

May 06, 2013, Just One More

A few months ago, I became acquainted with a website called **Cracked**. I had just been persuaded by several of my relatives to join **Facebook**, and someone of my myriad friends posted a link which purported to lead to a discussion of The five **Most Bad Ass Presidents of the USA.** Number 1 turned out to be one of my favorite historical characters, Theodore Roosevelt.

At the end of the interesting and amusing essay, there were suggestions for other, similar items. I clicked on one, read it, and spent several hours doing the lather, rinse, repeat thing. I'd look at the clock, and say to myself, Just one more and then I'll go to bed.

I was lucky that it was a weekend, and I could sleep in the next day.

This is nothing new for me, of course. As a child, I would often wile away an entire weekend reading the encyclopedia I didn't mean to, but I looked something up, and found the most insidious trap in the universe: See also, also known as q.v.viz, quod vide and so on. There was no escape (other than meal time . . . or the infamous call: Loren Keith Wiseman, you get in here right now or . . .).

I found that the trap didn't even have to be a direct reference. A collection of short stories. The complete DVD collection of a cherished TV series (a fan gave me the entire 10 seasons of **Stargate SG-1** after my cardiac troubles a couple of years ago, and I spent more time than I care to admit in a marathon viewing session).

Also note the inordinate number of footnotes and parenthetical statements in this editorial . . . just one more.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'll mention three:
1) He was the first (and as far as I know, the only) US President to dive in a submarine while in office (Carter served on one, and Bush the Elder rode in one during WWII, but both of these were before they were elected). This was in the days when there was a small but not insignificant chance the sub wouldn't come back up again.

2) He delivered a campaign speech with a bullet in his lung, after being shot . . . immediately after being shot. This was before X-rays, so he had no idea the wound wasn't potentially fatal.**

3) He has both a **Nobel Prize** (Peace) and a **Medal of Honor** (Spanish-American War), both of which are displayed in the **Roosevelt Room** of the **White House** (I'm not sure if his son, Theodore Jrs MoH (Omaha Beach) is there also or not).

** I just recently found out that his opponent declined to campaign until TR was back on his feet . . . presidential candidates used to have class.

May 20, 2013, Printing

I am thankful that my memories of the industrial printing process do not go back to the time when scribes copied each page by hand using pen and ink.*

Other than copying by hand, the oldest form of printing is called letterpress. Technically speaking a whole page carved out of a block of wood, inked, and stamped onto a sheet of paper/parchment/vellum/etc., is letterpress. The Chinese invented wood block printing as applied to books, although the basic idea dates back to the Sumerian invention of cylinder seals. Later innovations were movable type cast out of metal, and a large press to squeeze the paper onto the block/type. Letterpress printing is pretty much gone, although it was still used (in modified form) on some newspapers and books well into the late 1970s to the early 1980s.

The next innovation was engraving, which got kind of complicated. Basically, lines were carved into a sheet of soft metal (usually copper), in reverse. The printer smeared ink over the whole sheet, then wiped most of it off, leaving the ink inside the graven lines and the higher surfaces ink-free (if you did it right . . . this took a fair amount of skill). The printer carefully laid a sheet of paper over the plate, pressed it down and peeled it up. The ink came out of the graven lines and stuck to the paper (again, if you did everything right). Engraving was mostly used for drawings and images, but some people engraved text for printing books, and it was used for printing stock and bond certificates, maps, and bank notes (complex machinery was developed that could produce elaborate spirals and interlocked twirls, which you can see on old examples of currency –– it was tough to counterfeit . . . for a while). Engraving is still used on fancy jobs such as visiting cards and wedding invitations because the slightly raised result is considered classy and expensive.

The next improvement over letterpress was called offset.** In a way, this is a simplified version of engraving. A surface (originally a polished flat stone, hence the term lithography, later a sheet of metal) was coated with a ink-attractive compound, forming the image. Later, the compound was light sensitive and used a process similar to photography to deposit an image only on some places. Ink was wiped across the stone/plate, and it stuck only where the chemical was deposited, not on the stone/metal surface. The advantage of this system

was that it was fast, and the same plate could be for a vastly larger number of impressions, making enormous print runs economically feasible. Offset began replacing letterpress in the 1950s, and is still in widespread use today.

Ink jet printers (the next innovation) never achieved industrial use because they are complicated and not really suitable for large print runs, so they are mostly limited to office and home use.

Laser printing is really a modification of offset, where a laser beam is used to temporarily sensitize an area on a metal roller so it holds the ink (a powder) which is then pressed onto a sheet of paper under heat, which sets the ink into the fibers of the paper. The roller is then de-magnetized and the process starts again. It can be done very rapidly, and is how most print-on-demand documents are done because the set-up is incredibly inexpensive.

Printing with metal type began in the 1400s, and continued until recently. Originally the individual letters were picked and placed by hand, and you can still find hobbyists who do this today (my zoology professor in college was one). In the 19th century, machines were developed to cast whole lines, and eventually whole blocks of type out of molten metal, and printing could be done much faster.

With offset, type could be set on paper, photographed, and the negative used to sensitize a printing plate. Eventually, typesetting and platemaking were computerized, but offset remains the printer of choice for large jobs.

I remember seeing my first game printed on a large Heidelberg offset press (**GDW**'s *Drang Nach Osten*, in 1973). It was an experience I cannot forget, even 40 years later.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Although people still do that kind of thing, as a hobby.

**The difference was once described to me thus: When a girl kisses you on the cheek, whatÀs on your cheek is letterpress. When you blot it off on a tissue, what's on the tissue is offset.

Jun 03, 2013, Why I'll Probably Be A Hermit in 10 Years

Science fiction fans are supposed to look forward to the future. At least, that was true until people started feeling pessimistic about the future, and writers began producing Dystopic versions of the years to come.* I'm not sure when it began to happen, but Frank Chadwick, my boss at **GDW** way back when, once remarked that an increasing amount of science fiction seemed to be about alternate histories (counterfactuals as their aficionados call them), and he thought this was because a lot of writers and readers thought that the best years of humanity were in the past. I don't think this is necessarily true, but I can see a number of reasons I'm not going to be a happy camper in the future.

The main reason for this is the fact that face (and body) recognition software is becoming increasingly sophisticated. As a result, I think the future is going to become increasingly annoying not repressive, annoying.

In the late 1990s, I began to use online retailers, and after a few years, I noticed they were sending me suggestions on things they thought I might like to buy. They were taking the fact that I was a male of a given age, and assuming I would like things that other males of my age would like. They were mostly wrong. As the software became more sophisticated, and the data they had amassed increased (mostly my buying habits), they refined their suggestions or so they thought. They were pretty good at predicting what I had already bought, and deducing that since I had bought books by a given author, I might like other

titles by that author. But their algorithms assumed because I like item A, I might also like to buy other items that men my age who bought item A also bought. **Netflix**, for example, noticed I had ordered movies that happened to star Virginia Mayo: **The Flame and the Arrow** (opposite Burt Lancaster) and **Captain Horatio Hornblower** (opposite Gregory Peck). Because the films had nothing else in common other than one actress (at least in their superficial databank), **Netflix**'s software presumably concluded I like films starring Ms. Mayo. They were wrong. I ordered the films because I like action adventure stuff (these particular two had a special attraction because I had watched them in my tweens on late night TV). **Netflix** (or at least their software) has become more discerning, as they now suggest titles according to subject matter as well as actors and directors. They still have trouble figuring out the kind of movies I want to watch . . . my eclectic tastes seem to throw their software for a loop (they continually suggest I might want to watch things like the **Bourne Series**, or the TV series **24** for example.

The internet now seems to think it knows me well enough to send me popup ads on many websites, and these are becoming increasingly annoying. They can be blocked by software, but the advertisers are beginning to make it necessary to view them in order to see the websites. And things are due to get worse because of the body/facial recognition software I mentioned above.

Soon, as I walk through a mall, a grocery, or even walk down the street, cameras will pick me up, determine my gender and age, and adjust the signs and advertising displays according to what the software thinks I need to buy. This is nothing new advertisers have always done this, but it will soon turn the annoyance level up to 11 (as recent movies like **Minority Report** have shown), as technology enables sound to be directed to individuals from a distance. Presumably there will be some kind of kill spam hardware I can buy (if I have the money) and also the advertisers will continual work to develop countermeasures, and so on ad infinitum.

Restaurants will know what I order, and offer that to me on the touchscreen system that will soon replace living cashiers at fast food places (the person taking your order in the drive-through window is increasingly not in the same location as the window itself). Banks are planning to do away with live tellers (at least the ones in the same building as you are). The ATM at the bankette most convenient to my apartment seems determined to ignore my attempts to input instructions through the touchscreen . . . I press one button, and the one above or below it is selected—or the machine ignores my touch completely even if my touch is with a fist and accompanied by profanity.

Its enough to make a person never leave the apartment . . . until the grocery delivery robot takes a dislike to me . . .

I look forward to many things about the future . . . not the least of which will be the medical advances that will let people grow replacements for my pancreas and my heart (and any other organ that starts giving me trouble). But some things make me want to pull the comforter over my head and shout La-la-la-la-la-la I can't hear you!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Not that dystopias are a recent phenomenon H. G. Wells produced the first ones I know of, and the genre probably predates ol' Herbert George.

Jun 17, 2013, Anniversaries 2

As I have remarked before, June 22, 2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the founding of **Game Designers Workshop.*** Marc Miller, Frank Chadwick, Rich Banner and my humble self had been employed by **Illinois State University** under a grant from the state of Illinois to create simulations and games for teaching purposes, and thus our professional game credentials start some time before this date. Frank and Rich, however, had been working on a board wargame simulating WWII on the division level, and decided to try publishing it as a joint venture. To raise funds, they sought investors from the **ISU Simulation Games Club,** and several members kicked in some $$$. In addition, several members of the club who had produced other game designs were invited to join in a more permanent venture, after the first game had returned enough money to pay back the investors in the original joint venture, Marc, Frank, and Rich were to be majority partners in **GDW**, and John Harshman and I were to be junior partners. All of that took place over the spring and early summer of 1973, but the initial game of what was to become the famed **Europa Series** (*Drang Nach Osten*) and its follow-on game (*Unentshieden*) sold well enough that the games **Triplanetary, Chaco**, and my game **Eagles** were published later that year.

Later, we decided that since June 22 marked the day in 1941 that Germany invaded the Soviet Union, June 22, 1973 was as good a foundation date as any for **GDW**.

Initially, the art studio was in Rich's house, and the assembly line, warehouse, and shipping facility was in the 2/1 apartment shared by Marc and Frank (we had a PO box in Bloomington, Illinois, a twin city with Normal). About the same time we located a rental office in beautiful downtown Normal, Illinois and relocated operations there (in mid 1974), we ran across a game called **Dungeons & Dragons** (courtesy of a gentleman named Tony Svaljenka, at the **University of Illinois in Urbana**), and after playing that for a time, we decided that RPGs had potential, and produced one called *En Garde*. in 1975. **Traveller** followed a few years later.

Anyway, the fact that I am still in the gaming business after four decades is astounding to me. I never dreamed Id be doing business at the same stand this long frankly, I'm not sure what I expected to be doing. I never gave the matter much thought until the early 1990s.

A lot of water has gone over the bridge since then, but I consider the time I spent at **GDW** to be the best years of my life. I am often asked if there is anything I would do different, and (although there are a few minor character flaws I wish I'd worked harder to change) theres nothing I can think of Id care to change.** I have often thought of writing a book of my memoirs and have tentatively titled it **No Place That I'd Rather Be**.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* It was a few years before we incorporated, so the Inc. is out of place.

** My answer at conventions to the What would you do differently? question is: I wouldn't pay full price to see **Aliens 3**.

Jul 01, 2013, Coupla Things

In my desire to discuss anniversaries last time out, I missed a rather important one. 2013 is the 150th anniversary of 1863, and July 1-3 is the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg and July 4th of the surrender of Vicksburg, two events that signaled the turning of the tide during the American Civil War (although the end of the war took almost another two years). I have been celebrating these events over the last couple of days by watching the relevant episodes of **The Civil War** by Ken Burns. and **Gettysburg** by **Turner Pictures.**

Purists will argue with the accuracy of the latter,* but these are as good as Hollywood ever gets history on film.

What a lot of people don't seem to understand is that films/TV/theater/books/etc. are different from history—they have to tell a story. History, fascinating as it is, does not always (if ever) have a decent narrative structure, seldom has convenient heroes and love interests and sometimes doesn't work out with a happy ending and everything tied up with a bow. The Burns effort was a 6+ hour documentary, and was still criticized for leaving out important bits and focusing too much on some aspects of the subject (I myself didn't like some of the talking heads they got, although Shelby Foote is not among these). **Gettysburg** was based on a novel, and it skipped numerous vital parts of the battle to focus on people and actions the author considered the core of the battle, to the detriment of others. I've seen people criticize the film (and the book also) because there was no mention of the role George Armstrong Custer played yes, he was there, and did some important work . . . but the audience would have thought the producers were name dropping.**

I've often thought that the WWII landing at Tarawa would make an interesting movie, until I made a serious effort to do a screenplay on the topic. It is hard to pick characters to focus on, any romance would have to be in the prologue or in flashbacks, and there is not much in the way of sweeping action going on. The island is kind of cramped, and you can see clear across it at several places, so finding a location to film presents some problems as well. Someone more skilled than I will need to undertake the task.

Another sesquicentennial this year is the storming of Battery Wagner by the 54th Massachusetts, another doomed charge notable for the fact that it was one of the first (although not the first) action by a regiment of freedmen and escaped slaves, depicted in the movie **Glory** (also criticized by purists).

Notwithstanding, movies about history, if done well (and even if not) can get the watcher thinking about the subject, and spark interest in further investigation.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* And with the former, for that matter . . . purists are like that.
** There is a character named Patton in the film (George S. Patton's grandfather) . . . not much is made of this fact, because pretty much all he does is get killed. Extra points to those who can identify the actor who played him.

Jul 15, 2013, A Question

Like a lot of history buffs, I wonder about sociological and cultural questions from time to time. Heres one I ponder every July:

4th of July Concerts: The bill of fare at most local 4th of July concerts is pretty much the same.* There are a few popular patriotic songs with rock or C&W origins like **Born in the USA,** and **God Bless the USA**, plus Traditional faves such as **God Bless America**,* **Columbia**, the **Gem of the Ocean** and almost every Sousa march in existence. Most of the songs are played in accompaniment to the fireworks displays, including selections from a composition by Peter I. Tchaikovsky, the **1812 Overture**.

I find this last melody odd because it 1) seems a particular favorite among American audiences, and 2) contains themes extracted from the French national anthem (*La Marseillaise)* and the old Tsarist national anthem, *Bozhe, Tsarya Khrani!* (Long live the Tsar!), and celebrates the defeat of Napoleon's armies in Russia in 1812. For myself, I prefer things like Handel's **Music for the Royal Fireworks** (which was written to entertain the British King

George II during a firework display***). It just seems like an odd choice for an American audience . . . I suppose the reason we like it so much is that the score calls for cannons to be fired during the climax, and Americans like cannons almost as much as they do fireworks and gunfire.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Except, of course, the ones that are televised and feature one or more famous singers/ bands/etc. Those tend to feature at least one Top 40 number by the celeb in question, usually something that won't last out the decade.

** Written by Irving Berlin, whose compositions have a strong grip on the heartstrings of America. His **White Christmas** is one of the most beloved non-secular Christmas songs.

*** During the first performance of this composition, the fireworks set the bandstand on fire, and the musicians were forced to flee, still playing the song as they ran . . . it's good to be the king. Not so great to be an 18th Century session musician . . .

Jul 29, 2013, Reality

Fan Anders Blixt can usually be counted on for interesting ideas, and this one is no exception. It refers the reader to an article elsewhere, and proposes that inspiration for running a **Traveller** merchant campaign on an **Amber Zoned** world can be found in the travails of bush pilots trying to operate in Somalia (which is a fair-to-middlin' example of a Law Level 0 environment.)*

Another situation ripe for harvesting is represented in Haiti, where running a factory using a labor force that is willing to work very cheaply runs afoul of other problems: the biggest of which is persuading corrupt government officials to stay bought once you've bribed them. Several organizations are attempting to bring manufacturing jobs to Haiti, but the mountain of red tape makes things out of reach of all but the largest and most well-connected businesses.

These ideas only touch the surface of the notion of using reality as a basis for fantasy, as many SF authors have done for decades. Several SF authors (Harry Turtledove, for one example) are also respected writers of history (Turtledove specializes in Byzantine history). Writers of military SF have used historical battles and campaigns as plot devices for novels (Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle used the **Battle of the Little Bighorn** as the basis for a futuristic fight on one of their novels in the **Falkenberg Series,** and **Xenophon's Adventures in Asia Minor** have inspired several novels). I leave finding these as an exercise for the reader.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I would also say that this is a pretty good example of what a libertarian society could be like, but I don't want to start an argument.

Aug 12, 2013, The Golden Age

From time to time, someone would bring up the notion of the good old days with my father, usually trying to set up some nostalgic reminiscence about how much better things were in times gone by when prices were low, politicians were demigods, and [insert racial/

ethnic/gender/age-groups of your choice] knew their place. My father refused to agree with their underlying point: *The Good Old Days* are now. He would proclaim. Anyone who disagreed got a short but emphatic rant: Prices may have seemed low (a gallon of gas and a loaf of bread used to be $0.10, he agreed, but that was when $1-2 an hour was a good wage. And there was no such thing as antibiotics, for any price.* Electricity in every house is common now, but when he was a boy, it used to be pretty scarce outside of the cities. He watched the **Apollo** landing live in 1969, and traveled to Florida in a few hours by supersonic jet (something that would have required days to do by car in his childhood.

I forget where I read it, but I recall an SF author once talking about the Golden Age of science fiction, and how there were actually several . . . each major generation of writers and critics labeled a different period the Golden Age. Readers of comics had still other periods, and these also changed as time passed. What the author concluded was basically that for a given individual, the Golden Age was the age of 12, or at least the early teens, when the world was fresh and new and open to discovery.

I discovered SF literature at about the age of 10 or 11, on the shelves of the **Randolph Township Library**. There was a large selection of it, largely due to the actions of a local SF Fan/Writer/Celebrity Wilson Bob Tucker, who saw to it that the library shelves were well supplied with both juvenile and adult works of the genre. I have fond memories of the reading I did in those days, but I don't remember too many authors . . . I was silly enough not to care who wrote a given book, as I read everything that had the little silver and black rocketship sticker on the side of it. I learned later to seek out certain authors, but even these days I will run across a story I remember reading at quite a young age, but never connecting a name with until now.**

Things seem better to us when viewed through the lens of long years. The people reminiscing with my father about the price of milk and the simplicity of life when they were young often don't realize how rough things were for their parents in those long gone days.

I find myself agreeing with my fathers sentiments that the good old days are now. I just happened to see a movie about a man having a heart attack, filmed only 35 years ago. It was quite detailed, and I couldn't help but to compare the events in the movie with my cardiac surgery. Things have gotten much better in the last 35 years.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Antibiotics were an important development to him. He lost an infant sister to pertussis in the 1920s, and suffered through an infant daughter coming down with the same disease decades later—the difference being penicillin was available for my sister, which is why she (and her children and grandchildren) are around today.

** I recently found a story I read in fifth grade in a collection of works by author John D. MacDonald. I later enjoyed Mr. MacDonald's prodigious works of detective fiction before discovering that he also wrote SF too.

Aug 26, 2013, Status Update Aug 2013

I recently received an email from a fan who was concerned that there had not been a recent update on my health. It occurred to me that my last update to my (web page was at least a year ago, and that some of you might be curious.

Physically, I still bear a sizable scar on my chest, and I don't think thats going away any time soon. The scars on my left leg where the donor veins were taken are almost imperceptible. I have to look very close to see the faint puckering on my left wrist where the central

line went in.

My knees still hurt from time to time, but they did that before the cardiac event, so I didn't expect much improvement. Nevertheless, the aches make it hard to exercise as much as I should, and sometimes just standing up is a considerable effort (I can no longer rise up from a chair without pushing off with my arms). If I sit for too long, it can take even longer to get the use of my legs back, and sometimes, after standing, I need to wait a minute or so to get cortical control back. Walking is good for the aches in my back, but it is hard to work up the energy sometimes.

I tire easily, and 8 hours of sleep seems too few sometimes I nap in the late afternoon sometimes, and often fall asleep watching television in the early evening (I haven't seen a complete session of the evening network news in weeks).

I can't seem to focus on writing for more than an hour or two at a time, and my production has slowed even from the glacial trickle it once was. I try shifting from one project to another to try to boost my interest, but it remains an up-hill struggle.

My biggest problem is fiscal: I can't afford to pay rent, utilities, food, and medication at the same time . . . indeed, I am now paying as much for medicines as I do for rent, and sometimes I have to choose between one or the other. When the **Affordable Care Act** insurance provisions kick in over the coming months, I'll still have trouble affording the premiums . . . right now, I can't afford insurance because of my pre-existing conditions (heart attack, diabetes, and high blood pressure) make the required payments too high. There are several things that will get better soon . . . I'll be old enough for Medicare in a few years, and certain diagnostic and preventative procedures will have no co-pay as the ACA kicks in. Nevertheless, I am thinking of going to a medical crowdsourcing website (right now I'm looking at a place called **Youcaring.com**—and I'll let you know when I start the campaign to raise money for my medical fund.*

In the meantime, I'm working on a **GURPS Traveller** project, another couple of PDFs for sale through **e23** and **RPGNow** (search for **Loren Wiseman Enterprises)**, and a couple of little surprises I hope people will enjoy.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, JTAS

* Those of you who want to help out can send donations to *Loren@sjgames.com* through **PayPal.com.** Any amount will help.

Sep 09, 2013, *We're Not In Kansas Any More*

Perhaps I am just getting older, but it seems to me that I am not only increasingly starting to act like my father, in some ways I am beginning to feel like I am stranded in a world of aliens. This is handy for the **Traveller** GM (and by extension, the **Traveller** author) because giving the players culture shock from time to time is better if it has a certain degree of familiarity to it.

I recently ran across a little blurb in a magazine that stated that the **KFC Corporation**⋆ recently began producing boneless chicken because pretty much anyone born after 1990 doesn't know how to deal with bones in the small pieces of burnt dead birds they are eating. Whether this means that increasing numbers of the diners are choking on chicken bones, or that they find the bones too much work to eat around, or that they merely find bones in their food too creepy to deal with, I have no idea. Several decades of dealing with "nuggets" and "planks" and "fingers" seems to be breeding a generation of people who prefer their chicken without crunchy bits (except for the "extra-crispy" coating on some of it).

I begin to wonder what several generations of people raised on vat-grown meat will think when confronted with food that is not a consistent shape, has internal support structures that are inedible, and has a stringy texture. **GDW** back in the day tried setting up something of this sort in the background for **2300 AD** by creating a multi-world food franchise called **Fud Extruders**™—"*Home of the Footlong Hard-Boiled Egg!*"

One wonders what future consumers will think of present day foodstuffs . . . will they find them as odd as we 21st century folks find the first canned foods: the Sears-Roebuck 1890 Catalog offered canned goods, including a whole roast chicken—bones and all.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Formerly known as "**Kentucky Fried Chicken**," but evidently the powers that be at the company don't want to be associated with fried food any more than they absolutely have to, so they've changed their name.

Sep 23, 2013, Culture Shock

I (like most gamers) like movies and TV, (that is, I enjoy watching video entertainment on a screen of some kind*). **Fox** seems to have started a new movie network on broadcast and cable TV, and is running what appears to be their library of old stuff (the newest film I've seen so far is from the early 1990s). Some of these are SF and some of them are from far enough in the past they almost need explanatory footnotes to explain why telephones all have dials and why police officers don't have portable radios (in their cars!). I even remember when you had to pick up the earpiece and hold it to your ear with one hand while you talked into the mouthpiece with the other (unless the bulk of the phone was mounted on the wall). This was at my grandparents, mind you my parents had a conventional black bakelite** rotary phone (but it was relatively new . . . the scar where the wall unit had been mounted was painted over on the wall).

I remember when touch-tone telephones were introduced (there was an extra charge for a couple of years . . . the phone company pushed them as luxury items until economic issues forced them to replace their equipment, and then rotary phones became as dead as the dodo, except for faux rotary phones for antique lovers).

I recently watched a cop show where one of the plot points was that the murder victim didn't have a cell phone . . . screenwriters seem to think they are universal, which is not true they are merely near universal (although half of the homeless passengers on the Austin metro bus system seem to have them).

I recently read an article online that listed a number of aspects of parenting as practiced overseas that would be considered child abuse in the USA., such as leaving infants unattended on the street outside restaurants and bars, or serving alcoholic beverages to kids. This struck me as a perfect example of the sort of thing a GM could use to emphasize a world's unusual nature to off-worlders . . . sometimes called the *not in Kansas* effect.

Other cultural differences include what is and isn't considered fit to eat from one culture to another. Some oriental cultures consider cheese and other milk products a culinary atrocity, French cuisine includes snails and a few other things Americans find distasteful. *Haggis, lutefisk, kimchi,* and a thousand other items fill the list. Change a few descriptions and ingredients and you have a menu to amaze, amuse, and disgust some or all of your players.

As always, I leave follow-up research to the readers.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I'm still rather behind the times . . . I'm on a land line, so I can't stream stuff from on-line and I don't own a smart phone (I've only had a dumb phone for a few years) or a tablet.

** I notice that **MS Word** doesn't force capitalize bakelite . . . I guess the trademark is no longer important on that stuff.

Oct 07, 2013, Traveller Militar(ies)

The original approach to **Traveller**'s military forces was because Marc intended to have the military characters be opposed to the Imperial government. The Ine Givar were origi-nally supposed to be the Good Guys, and fought against the **Evil Imperium**. Pretty early on, however, Marc had decided to make the Ine Givar into the bad guys (this was when Frank's article listing the emperors was still a background document). By the time the Ine Givar had been mentioned in the **TNS** dispatches, they had been converted into the Bad Guys and the Imperium had become the good guys. The first playtests had no real background other than a few worlds that soon became engaged in a war, but the combat system was so dangerous that most of the playtest groups acquired a ship by some means or other (usually by serving in the Scouts for decades), and began smuggling for one side or the other (sometimes both).

However, the character creation rules were pretty much set in stone Army, Navy, Ma-rines, Merchants, Scouts, and Other (the thinly-disguised criminal group). Marc decided to leave the six basic groups as they were, and maybe expand the basic groups later on. At this point, Marc still planned to do several RPGs, one for each major time group of history—ancients, pirates, cowboys, and a few other groups that never really got settled. **Traveller** sold so well, however, that we never did the other rule books . . . **Traveller** fans demanded more **Traveller** books, and we devoted our limited talent to filling the demand for **Traveller** products. We eventually did expand the non-military groups, but military careers remained vary popular for some reason.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Oct 21, 2013, OGRE Launch Party (Austin)

There were over two hundred attendees at the **OGRE Launch Party** in Austin Satur-day/Sunday. The initial rush Saturday morning took over two hours to deal with, consid-ering that what people tended to do was get signed in, go to the pick up my **OGRE** stuff counter, get their stuff, and spend the next two hours dealing with opening, assembling, and drooling over the loot. People then spent the rest of the day trying to fit things back into the box, and then taking the pieces out of the box again to play games. Many customers had bought several copies, and took them to their cars (it was a relatively cool day).

I was assigned Customer Service, and spent most of the party chatting with fans while they waited for the *queue* to pick up their stuff/**w23** to fall off a little. There weren't many CS issues at the party, so it was mostly gentle chat with fans, some of whom realized who I was, some of whom eventually figured it out, and some of whom didn't care. I ran into a lot of people I hadn't seen in years, and quite a few I had never met, but had played **Traveller** for years. I had great fun, even though I won't get my copy of the **OGRE DE** for a week or so . . .

Im still pretty tired after the two days of the party, so I'm going to cut this a little short and go to bed early . . . again.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Nov 04, 2013, Time Traveller

As I mentioned in a recent editorial, Marc Miller originally considered releasing a series of RPGs based on the game mechanics of **Traveller** but set in different historical eras . . . I never saw his complete notes on the titles, but I know that there was to be one based on Ancient Rome, one in the Middle Ages, one in the 17th century devoted to pirates, and one set in the "Wild West" of 1870-1890. These never got much beyond the titles (at least not as far as I know), but I'm sure he worked on some or all of them before abandoning the project(s). The main reason that nothing much was ever done with them was because he chose to devote his time to **Traveller** projects before about 1982-1984 or so, and to Mega-**Traveller** afterwards.

I puttered around with a couple of time travel games in the late 1980s, while I was line manager for **Twilight: 2000.** Neither ever had a formal name assigned to it, but one basically assumed that humanity was ending, and teams were being sent back to re-jigger the past to keep the future from ending. The second assumed that an evil team of time travelers had taken control of certain key points in the past, and that your assignment was to try to change the past to bring it back under the control of the good guys.

The rules were basically those of **Twilight: 2000,** but modified (mostly in the character generation mechanics). I never worked too heavily on the rules, since I figured that if we were to do the game, Frank would take over the mechanics of the rules, and leave me with the details of the background.

The part I found interesting about the second game was that you could try it several times, and basically score yourself against a flexible series of results, depending on how much you changed history. The problem was that you could only travel to certain points of history, and that you couldn't visit the same place twice (two of "you" in one place would cause both of you to explode or some such thing).

Like Marc, however, I discovered that the strain of keeping one major RPG trail going (**Twilight: 2000**, in my case) was rather too heavy to allow another game to be developed. Pity.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Nov 18, 2013, Guns or Butter

One of the subjects of a recent editorial was the military origins of **Traveller's** character types. It didn't occur to me at the time to write about the mercantile aspects of the game—in fact, the trade aspects of the game developed pretty much by accident.

All of us who worked on the game were military historians, which (as I noted previously) explains the fact that practically every character was military, at least in the early days. Army, Navy, Marines, Scouts, Merchants, and Other (which was mostly criminal types) were the six initial character types.

Amongst the fans, however, things went a little differently. People generated characters until they got one with a starship, discarding the ones they didn't like. The merchant became the captain, the rest of the crew became the crew of the starship, and the stalwart band of heroes began trading/exploring the universe. Small playing groups generated two or three

characters per player. Solo players* would generate a ship full of NPCs, and begin trading, running from port to port buying, selling, and generally setting up little self-contained mercantile networks until the ship was paid off and fully equipped. What happened next usually depended on how many people were in the group:

Groups consisting of two or more players generally began running adventures with larger backgrounds, and explored sector after sector.

Solo players (or small groups) generally continued to operate, buying more ships, hiring NPCs to operate them, and generally giving people a good reason to call **Traveller** "the game for bean counters."

All of it pretty much without our support. Although we did notice the demand for mercantile rules . . . eventually.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Something that **Traveller** fans also invented, although Marc was to spot it and allow for them very early on.

Dec 02, 2013, Staterooms

For years, we had a stateroom laid out in masking tape on the floor in the large meeting room in the old **GDW** headquarters. Marc laid it out . . . I think. It may have been Frank, or it may have been both of them. Neither one remembers, but it was evidently very important for it to be where it could be looked at and paced over. For some reason, all the people who assigned to wash the linoleum took it easy on the tape of the stateroom.

Sometimes we laid out other structures as well, but they always disappeared after a few days, a few weeks, or (at most) a few months. Nobody really knows why the stateroom stayed in place, except maybe because it was first. Anyway, eventually, the tape had faded away almost completely, and we finally decided to peel up the several layers of linoleum and replace it with something else. But when we took up the floor, we discovered that the wood underneath was a beautiful oak floorboard.* Which we just sandpapered, varnished, and left as it was. For some reason or other, a couple of layers of varnish on the old oak looked so much better than the linoleum that had covered it for years.

I hadn't thought about the stateroom in years, but I saw an old oak floor the other day, which brought back memories of the previous inhabitant.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Well, except for the parts that were waterstained black . . .the place had been a beauty shop for years, after all.

Dec 16, 2013, The Common Cold

One of the common features of modern life is the common head cold. People seem to get them, keep them for a week or ten days, and than either get rid of it or catch another one. I'm currently on my third. I seem to catch one on Thursday evening, spend the weekend sniffling and snorting, then on Monday I seem to get rid of the symptoms . . . most of them anyway . . . and feel well enough to go back to work. Only to start again on Thursday . . . at least for the last four or five weeks.

The pharmacy section of the grocers is full of non-prescription remedies for various combinations of symptoms . . . mostly nasal catarrh and cough. In my particular case, I have to watch out for the nostrums and notions that aggravate high blood pressure—there are a large number of over-the-counter medications that mess up one's blood pressure. There are also a growing selection of pills and syrups in the "diabetes" section. These all seem to have about the same effect as the non-diabetes medications: the cough/sneeze goes away in a week or 10 days without the treatment, and in 7-10 days with it. The main difference between the two is that things seem to get slightly better for a few hours with the medicine. I'm not sure if the slight improvement is due to the placebo effect or not.

Over the years, I've discovered several treatments that seem to work fairly well, although none of them require a special trip to the pharmacy. Hard candies (sugar-free or not) work about as well on a cough as medicated lozenges. Tea and/or soup help clear up a cloggy chest. Taking a hot shower before bedtime can clear up nasal drip and can help a cough. All of these are centuries old.

One wonders what the future will bring.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Dec 30, 2013, Happy 2014!

There's not much going on in Texas right now . . . **SJ Games** has the time between Christmas and January 6th as a paid holiday, and I'm spending most of it either napping or watching TV. I'm fortunate to have both electricity and natural gas heating, and the temperature is mildly below normal for the time of year. Between **Netflix** and **The Movie Channel,** I'm keeping quite well entertained.

Here's hoping that everyone of the subscribers are warm and dry, and can welcome the New Year with a party, even if the party only consists of one.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

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Jan 13, 2014, Deciding What To Abandon

As the years pass, I'm increasingly facing a decision I've been putting off for over a decade: Which unpainted miniatures to abandon.* I have unpainted miniatures in scales ranging from 1/300 to 1/16 (only one of the latter), in numbers ranging from one to several thousand. Here's a brief breakdown:

1/300 Seven Years War: I have approximately 200 of these, acquired over the years, mostly as a result of **GDW** publishing **Volley and Bayonet**, a set of rules dealing with warfare in the 18th and 19th century. I'm increasingly unable to see the fine detail on the figures, but I stubbornly refuse to get rid of the figures. Not sure why . . . maybe its because I want to finish something that small and use it in battle.

1/300: These are painted in a sense . . . they were sprayed olive drab and used as part of the playtest for **Command Decision**. I meant to add minor details to them, but after I changed focus from 1/300 scale to 15mm and from Western Europe to the Pacific Theater, I just parked them in boxes. These are probably going to go . . . some time soon.

15mm Roman/Sassanid: I have about 2000 Roman and about 3000 Sassanid troops, of which about half are painted. I've based these for WRG 7th edition, mostly. I'm currently planning on rebasing these, possibly for **Hail Caesar**.

15mm Medieval: About 200, assorted Norman cavalry and infantry, some in the original packaging. I don't now why I bought these, and will probably get rid of them sooner or later.

15mm English Civil War: About 1000 total, purchased when I was working on an **ECW** set of miniatures rules. Never painted, some still in the original packaging. The miniatures rules got about as far into development as well. Bound for the auction block.

28mm Hundred Years War: About 500, various types, mostly because I had developed a set of skirmish rules for them. Perhaps 10% painted, probably going to hang around because I still have the notes for the miniatures rules someplace.

15mm American Civil War: About 200 figures, perhaps 30-40 or so painted. Acquired for play with **Johnny Reb** when **GDW** acquired the rules system. These are probably bound for the auction block . . . eventually.

15mm WWII: A regiment of USMC, and one of Japanese Infantry, plus assorted bits and pieces. These are mostly painted, and have actually been used in tabletop battles with various editions of **Command Decision**. I have about 50 or so painted 25mm WWII Japanese and about a dozen or so **USMC** figures. I decided to go with 15mm for WWII Pacific.

Of course, I have little dribs and drabs of SF minis, about 500 fantasy skeleton figs, and single figures of various things acquired over the years one must always have some unpainted lead, after all. Don't ask why . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Since I am increasingly unable to devote enough time to painting/basing them, let alone actually playing with them.

Jan 27, 2014, SitRep

Another report on my general health and condition, since it has been a while since I updated the readership.

The big news is that I managed to get fiscal assistance with a medical insurance plan,

and signed up with one that costs less than $50.00 per month, after financial aid. I now pay less than $20.00 for a doctor's visit, and as low as $4.00 (four dollars!) for some prescriptions that used to cost me $32.00. Ill pay less if I have to visit an emergency room, and certain tests (such as colonoscopies) are free. I still have to pay full price for some medical procedures, but I no longer have to worry about a sprain or some other minor injury messing up my finely-tuned budget.

Thats the biggest bit of good news to come down the pike lately, and it has taken a huge load off my worry list.

In other matters, I am losing weight, although not as much as I would like. My blood pressure is also down, although (again) not as much as I would like. My blood glucose level remains a little high, and my eyesight is beginning to fail me, especially at night, so I may have to get checked out at an opthomologist soon.

All in all, I'm in better shape than I've been in for a while, and I hope it continues.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 10, 2014, As Time Goes By . . . 1

I don't know what it is about time that makes it seem to go past so fast.* Recently, I remember getting a notice from the **Texas Department of Public Safety** (formerly known as the Texas Rangers – I need to look up when the name change occurred) that my personal identification card was due to expire, and I would have to come in and personally renew it . . . evidently, I would not be able to do so via email. This occurred in early February . . . 2013. I seem to have slipped up and forgotten that I need to go in to a **DPS** office and fill out some forms . . . for a year. I remember thinking "I need to go renew my ID card" from time to time, but it never occurred to me that time was rocketing past as quickly as it was. Not until recently. I now have to re-apply for the card, producing other forms of ID, a passport, and so on, and filling out even more paperwork, in addition to having a new photo taken. Bah.

As I entered my 60s, I began to think about what I would do with the (limited) time remaining to me, gamewise. It began to occur to me that I might not be able to accomplish everything I wanted to get done in terms of games. The project set in Hawaii in the 18th century involving Hawaiians, Russians, English, and American sailors might have to go unplayed, especially since there were practically no figures available, and scratchbuilding the four or five 28mm model boats might take a year or more (a year . . . yeah, I could do it it a year . . . no problem).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* When I was 10 years old (and I first realized the phenomenon) a year was 10% of my life . . . up until that point, anyway . . . and seemed to take a sizable chunk of my lifetime.

Feb 24, 2014, I Don't Drive

I don't drive.

This is just one of my idiosyncrasies, and not too strange, when you think about it. I took drivers' ed is school, and passed it. I acquired a license (but not a car) and went for several years in college without a car. The lack of an automobile was primarily an economy measure I had little free cash, and lived on campus, so I could walk or take a bus wherever I

needed to go. Gradually, I came to realize that I was a very poor driver. I had lousy peripheral vision, and my judgment was sluggish. I never really mastered parallel parking. I didn't get much practice, and gradually realized that I didn't like driving. I never had a serious accident, but I had a number of minor fender benders that convinced me I was not very good. The last time I drove* was 1972 or 1973, and eventually I decided not to do it again. I let my license lapse, and took a state-issued identification card instead.

If I lived in New York City, I would not be considered odd in any way—many people in NYC (and other large cities) do not drive (although some of them have licenses). If I lived in Los Angeles, I would be viewed as strange, possibly antisocial.

Basically, I take city buses where I need to go, and use taxis or walk. Occasionally, I prevail upon friends for a lift, especially if I need to pick up something too large or clumsy to carry on a bus. In general, I don't think I have suffered too much for the lack of automotive transport. When I travel, I either do it with friends/relatives or use public transport. I have to plan my life a little more carefully, and occasionally I have to forgo a trip or a visit I might otherwise take.

In general, I an satisfied with the way things worked out.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

*John Harshman was my passenger at the end of the trip he fell on his knees and kissed the ground. He did not mention ever riding with me again.

Mar 10, 2014, A Few Things . . . 3

As it happens, March 7th is my birthday I turned *[mumble]ty-[mumble]* last Friday. I am still not quite old enough to qualify for **Social Security** or **Medicare**, but I am old enough to begin losing my memory. For example, despite the fact that I remembered that **SXSW*** started this weekend, I scheduled my laundry to happen this Monday I have to schedule my laundry in advance because I need to arrange for a ride to/from the Laundromat (as I mentioned last issue, I do not drive). Because my nephew is an EMT, he was called up to duty for the festivities, so I called a cab. But I discovered that the cab I normally use was booked solid for the whole day, and I had to take my chances calling the normal fleet and risking the abnormal delays encountered when a crowd of bazillions of musicians, film people, and tech people all crowd into town at once. Normally, it takes 10-15 minutes to get a cab, today it took over an hour both times I called. Had I been thinking properly, I would have made greater efforts to arrange to launder my clothes last week.

One of the things I need to arrange for laundry to be washed is buy detergent. This you can do at the grocery, but you have to remember to do that before you arrive at the laundry otherwise you have to buy the little over-priced boxes from the vending machines (or spend a dollar on a little 1/4 cup of detergent from the clerk at the place I now go to, which is about 10x what it costs in the grocery).

Things like this have been happening more often lately. Actually, I can't really say they've been happening any more often that they have been for the last two or three decades, its just that I seem to be noticing them more. At least, I seem to be getting irritated at them more.

Everybody I know complains about losing their memory from time to time, and these people range in age from their teens to their eighties (I don't talk to many people younger or older than that, but I suspect if I did, the complaints would stay the same).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* **South by South West** . . . a musical/film/educational/gaming/electronics/what-have-you festival that brings hordes of people and piles of money to Austin every year.

Mar 24, 2014, As Years Go Bye

It has been nearly 37 years since **GDW** first published **Traveller** and one thing I know is that the game seems to be especially vibrant. I know of three generation family teams of **Traveller** players/referees, and some campaigns have been going on since at least the early 1980s.

What makes **Traveller** such a powerful presence in gaming? The main thing, I think, is that **Traveller** has such a powerful gaming background—a history (or, more properly, histories) that go back more than three and a half decades, and there are a few lucky players that have been having adventures in Imperial space for nearly that time.

Marc Miller, the original designer of the game, initially intended to do several games set in different time periods,* using similar rules, but we never really got that project going . . . there seemed to be too much to be done in the **Traveller** game that **GDW** finally got a second RPG going only with **Twilight: 2000** seven years later. We did several other RPGs, finally, but never linked them together with a time travel game . . . something that would have been a little hard to do between **TravellerTwilight: 2000, Space: 1889** and **2300 AD** anyway. All of **GDW**'s rpgs were successful, and most of the main ones continued in print with other companies after **GDW** closed in 1995. We seem to have done something right.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Whether he ever intended to have a time travel game to link them all together is something I don't know . . . believe it or not, I never asked him!

Apr 07, 2014, Solo Players

One of **Marc Miller's** greatest ideas for **Traveller** was the notion that a player/referee didn't have to have a very large group in order to play the game. A referee could, in fact, get by completely on his lonesome for months (even years) on end.

It took me a while to appreciate the genius of this. **Traveller** allows so much stuff to be created that solo referees can just create stuff worlds, continents, interstellar corporations, characters, NPCs, starships, government agencies, and so on for years. I don't know of anyone who did nothing but create things for **Traveller**, but I'm fairly sure that there exists at least one, and quite probably a large number. At least temporarily, being able to play **Traveller** on ones own is quite an advantage, and Marc encouraged solitary players to engage in creative acts whenever they couldn't find enough people to get up a gaming circle.

As **GDW**'s customer service officer (for a while—I did a lot of different things in the 22 years I was there), I would receive letters from people who wanted to thank us for setting them on the path of solitaire play of the game. People would buy one or two books, start generating things for the time in the future when they would one day start playing, and eventually get around to forming a group and actually start a game. This was especially handy for submarine crewmen and similar folks who didn't have a lot of room for recreational playthings, but had a fair amount of time on their hands.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Apr 21, 2014, Downfall

About four weeks ago, the ceiling in my bedroom collapsed on the head of my bed. About 10 square feet collapsed to the ground, hitting my bed and the small nightstand that sat beside it. I discovered several things: 1) water can, over weeks and months, gradually erode a ceiling, not showing a single mark on the outside, 2) it is possible for a leak to develop in the apartment above mine without showing a single sign, and 3) it can take almost a month for the lining between floors to dry out enough to permit it to be repaired.

My landlord was flabbergasted as well. After paying for a plumber to fix the leak in the apartment above mine (which took about two hours the day after the ceiling collapsed in my bedroom), he spent the next month dropping in every couple of days to see how the rock wool insulation between floors was drying out. The insulation remained wet, for some reason, refusing to dry out and allow his drywall man to replace the fallen chunks. I had to move most of the furniture out of my bedroom, and every day had to sweep up the insulation bits and chunks of plaster that fell from the ceiling to the bedroom carpet. I also had to arrange to move the bed so it was not directly under the hole in my bedroom ceiling and allow me to sleep without getting dribbled on.

Eventually, the ceiling dried out and the drywall guy managed to fix the hole in the ceiling. This was interesting to watch, as he took about three hours to rip down the loose chunks of plaster, working from a stepstool. I was surprised at this, because (according to home repair TV shows like **This Old House**) drywall is applied to the ceiling by workmen wearing elevator shoes that add about a foot to their height. The drywall guy called in an assistant to help him hold the panels in place while screwing them into the joists, which took about an hour to accomplish. The drywall guy then spent the next six hours applying tape and plastering the seams, spattering the ceiling with a plaster-like substance to blend it in perfectly* with the rest of the ceiling, then painting the walls to match (again, almost a perfect match with the color of the previous wall).

I was moderately surprised that he had to come back the next day for an hour or two to apply a second coat of paint, but it is almost a perfect match. The guy was an artist.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Nearly perfectly—I have to look very closely to see where the seams don't quite match, but it requires a light and a lot of looking.

May 05, 2014, What Am I Reading?

I notice that a question that pops up a lot of places (the **SJG Forums Geek Culture** discussion, for example) is "*What are you reading?*" I don't usually answer these types of questions, because I (over the last couple of decades, anyway) I usually read something I already own.

For example, this week,* I re-read **The Outposter**, by Gordon R. Dickson. And D. Westheimer's Von Ryan's **Express**. And D. MacDonald's **Company Commander**. Nothing written after 1976. The last thing I read that had been written within a few years ago was Lindsey Davis' **Nemesis** (or George R. R. Martin's **Dance With Dragons** . . . I can't remem-

ber which I read most recently).

Basically, when I look for something to read, I normally just pull something from my bookshelf that I can't remember reading for several years. Going to the library became a bit of a hassle after my cardiac surgery, and I let my library card expire, which means that I need to go through the rigmarole of renewing it (which means I need to get my Texas State Identification card renewed, which I still have yet to get around to doing).

Anyway, I have stopped going to the library within the last couple of years, and I can't afford to visit the bookstore (or buy online) as often as I used to, but all that means is that I tend to re-read things I already own.

Within the last couple of years, I have been trying to get around more, but I still need to spend a day getting things renewed before I can start visiting the library again.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Beginning Friday, and continuing through Monday afternoon.

May 19, 2014, Old Movies

Lately, I've been watching a large number of movies, courtesy of **Netflix**, the **Movie Channel**, and the late, late, late show on local Austin television stations on weekends. Some of them are as good as I remember them being, and some of them are really pretty embarrassing, and one or two are much better than I remember them being.

I remember liking **The Long Ships** quite a bit when I was younger, but I can't really tell why nowadays. **The Vikings**, however, I always liked, and like it even more now. Both films are action/adventure films with Vikings running around doing Viking-like stuff –– **The Long Ships** at the end of the era dominated by the Vikings, and **The Vikings** at the beginning of the same era.

The Great Bank Robbery is a comedy about a group of thieves working to rob a bank that is used by bank robbers to keep their ill-gotten gains safe—and is also the target of a special team of Federal government agents (**Chinese Secret Service** agents, believe it or not, led by a Texas Ranger), who want proof the bank is being used by criminals. Everything is complicated by the other bands of ne'er-do-wells who continually try to rob the bank. I enjoy it a lot more now, since I have a more sophisticated sense of humor than I did when I was 16 and saw it for the first time.

I still enjoy **Gettysburg** (based on Shaara's **The Killer Angels**) as much as I ever did.

Nickelodeon is a film about the early days of the movie business in the USA, and is still as much fun to watch as it was back in the day.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 02, 2014, Camera Obscura

One of the things that people are expected to produce in large quantities these days are photographs. Many people have cameras, but the vast majority of photos these days are (so it seems, anyway) produced by portable phones. My cell phone doesn't have the capability to take pictures* and they stopped making film for my **Polaroid** camera about 20 years ago . . . the last camera I owned that didn't need film (the only such camera in fact) vanished during my last move.

During my last visit to Edinburgh, Scotland, I was followed by a gentlemen who took photos of me, and these are the last pictures that ave been taken of me (that I know of). A previous visit to Brighton (for the **Gen-Con UK Convention**) I bought a couple of disposable film cameras and had a dickens of a time finding a place to get them developed in the UK before I had to leave—turns out that just about any large camera store can find a place to do the job, but none of them do it on the premises.

Because I don't actually own a working camera any more, I find myself depending on others to supply me with recent photos of myself. I do have a couple of shoeboxes full of pictures of myself taken before 1990 or so, some of which I have scanned and stored on computer discs (some of which I cannot read on my current computer . . . thats another problem). My sister recently acquired a scanner, and has been converting the family photos over to jpgs, and I presume I can have copies of any of those I manage to ask for.

This is a rather roundabout explanation for why I don't have more than a few dozen pix on my **Facebook** page. That and the fact that **Facebook** evidently considers anything posted to their pages to be public domain . . .

One of these days, I presume cell phones with cameras will come down enough in price Ill be able to afford one. Although that may have already occurred . . . frankly, I'm a little behind in checking things like this out.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Or to do much besides make phone calls . . . I can text (well, the phone can text . . . I can't do it very well) make phone calls, and access the internet (theoretically—the screen is slightly larger than one square inch, and I have trouble seeing anything on it, even with a magnifying glass).

Jun 16, 2014, Assorted Bits

It took a few weeks, but the tech staff finally got the subscription problem straightened out, and **JTAS** can now be subscribed to through the new **W23** web page: here. Sorry that it took so long to straighten this out.

To the several people who wrote to tell me that **Polaroid** film is still manufactured, thank you for the information. If I ever find the camera (I do know what room it is in, at least), and it can be used (I cannot remember if I took the batteries out before storing it away), I might try to lay hands on some of the film.

Thanks to those of you who wrote in response to my column **Downfall,** I can sympathize with all of you. I am evidently lucky that the collapse of my bedroom ceiling was not accompanied by an infestation of wildlife.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 30, 2014, Summer Break

As those of you who keep a close watch on the **SJ Games** website already know, the staff of **Steve Jackson Games** are now partaking of a summer break . . . one week off (June 27 to July 6) with pay.

My plan is to spend the week (or so) as follows:

Straightening up my apartment. I've been rather slovenly of late, and things are begin-

ning to get a little out of hand (every wastebasket is full to overflowing, and the stack of takeout boxes and newspapers by the kitchen counter is beginning to build up higher than I like to see it (basically, it is now more than one armload—more than I like to carry to the dumpster in one trip).

In addition to a general spring cleaning I would like to get rid of some of my book collection . . . there are simply too many paperbacks clogging up my shelves (especially since I never replaced all of the shelf units destroyed during my move in 2010). This means several bus trips to the second hand bookstore to sell off my surplus, or I have to try to persuade someone who owns a car to give me a lift.*

Id like to also resume making (and selling) my chess sets using the latex rubber molds I bought a few years ago. I still have three sets cast up and drying (since it is more than 18 months since I cast them, I suspect they are now dry enough to paint).

My table needs some straightening up as well. Aside from the small space I use for dining sometimes, the table is filled with assorted hobby items that should really be finished up or stored away temporarily. It's kind of hard to work on one prokect when three or four others are sitting in the same space on the tabletop.

Finally, I need to do my laundry, finish a couple of interviews I owe people, prepare a new PDF for release through **RPG Now/E23**, and perhaps finish a chapter or two on the novel I haven't touched so far this year.

Maybe Ill get a quarter to a third of the list accomplished . . . :)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Probably not going to happen at this late date . . . most of the people I could dragoon into this task are leaving town for some or all of the break.

Jul 14, 2014, Convention Season

The summer has arrived (Austin had it's first 100 degree day for 2014 yesterday) and with it the summer convention season has already begun. I'm not (yet) scheduled for any show this season, but that could change.

I enjoy being a guest of honor at game and SF cons, but who wouldn't. You get to be treated like a celebrity, get to rub shoulders with other famous people, and get to travel to places you (well, me at least) don't ordinarily get to go.

In return, I normally serve on two or more seminars with a panel of 2 to 4 other people, discussing some topic of interest. Sometimes I do at least one solo panel, normally answering questions about my service in the game industry over the years. In addition, I usually have several autograph sessions, normally in combination with other quests at the convention.

I will sometimes be asked to run a session of **Traveller** or some other game that I have worked on over the years, although I usually try to avoid this in favor of playing with a group of gamers (I am a terrible gamemaster).

I generally have a great time at shows, and have only once been to one where I caught something and had to leave early.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jul 28, 2014, My GM Skills

I am not the world's best gamemaster/referee. People tell me that I am not as bad as I think I am, but I have seen so many people who are better than I am that I prefer not to try it. I haven't tried to referee a regular RPG campaign in almost 30 years, and it has been quite some time since I even ran a one off session. I can do tabletop miniatures games that incorporate RPG elements, but I prefer not to try anything that has solely RPG elements.

I'm not sure of the reasons for this dislike, although I really stink at it is probably too extreme (but comes close to being correct). I tend to railroad players along, which is not good. I cannot think fast, so I tend to stick with the first thing that comes to mind (which is not a good way to keep things free flowing). I had regular players in my **D&D** campaigns* who regularly attended my sessions and all professed regret when I finally gave up and they had to leave.

I think my biggest complaint was that I couldn't live up to the other referees I knew who could do things so much better than I could . . . people who could actually do individual voices for NPCs and could improvise encounters with random characters, and manage to keep things sorted out in their heads. People who could sort out what was happening in several different regions and could adjust when people didn't do what was expected of them.

I enjoyed playing in RPG campaigns much more than I enjoyed running them. Maybe that was my basic problem?

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I ran several over the years, as well as other titles and a few of my own invention (that never saw print, sadly).

Aug 11, 2014, Movies 2014

I happened to watch several interesting movies this weekend:

First, I saw **Guardians of the Galaxy,** which I enjoyed a great deal. A friend of mine was quite enthused by the notion of one of the characters being a raccoon, and kept me posted on the movie, and when the opportunity came to see it, I jumped at the chance to catch it as a matinee Sunday afternoon. I enjoyed it greatly, and may add it to my **Netflix** list to see it a second time. It occurs to me that a sequel is already planned, and that Vin Diesel's character is almost a shoe-in to appear in it, since his dialog is already recorded.

The second film I saw earlier in the weekend was Von Ryan's **Express**, from the book of the same name. It was radically different from the book, and not as enjoyable as it was when I first saw it 30+ years ago. They eliminated several characters, eliminated several major plot lines (granted probably necessary to make the running time shorter), and added a woman for no discernible reason other than to have a woman in the movie.

At the moment, I'm listening to **From Here to Eternity**, which won several **Oscar** nominations in the early 1950s. It is a pretty good representation of life in the pre-WWII **US Army** in Hawaii (the last scenes are the Pearl Harbor attack and the immediate aftermath, although most of the action takes place is the weeks before the attack. This one is still as enjoyable as it was when I first saw it.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Aug 25, 2014, Keeping Up With Traveller

I have kind of a problem with **Traveller** these days: there are so many versions of it that I can't keep up with all of them. I never completely kept up with **MegaTraveller** back in the 1980s. I could follow along and play in an adventuring session . . . provided I didn't have to design a ship or something . . . but when subsequent versions of the game came out, I slipped farther and farther behind.

I managed to keep more or less up with **GURPS Traveller** because it was fairly simple, but Steve made several people available to help me along with the tough parts, and keep me on line with things. However, I never really managed to follow along with subsequent versions, like **Mongoose Traveller, Hero Traveller,** or **Traveller5**.

What this means is that I have to keep to things that I know well as I write for the game, or have a co-author who knows the details who can help me through the rough spots. This means that my output is slowed (or, for a while, stopped). I have spent the last couple of years basically doing nothing, and gradually work back to where I was before I had the heart attack. I've gradually begun to work on several pre-heart attack projects, and I hope to finish at least one before the year is out.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Sep 08, 2014, How Time Flies

Especially when you're having fun. Although I didn't have much to do with it, I'm still remembering* the massive undertaking that **GURPS 4th Edition** was to get into print. Dr Kromm seems to have spent a sizable chuck of his life working on the project, and I think he still wakes up in a shiver, afraid that some vital part was left undone.

Practically every major **GURPS** author was involved in the project in one way or another, and some of them still are. Congratulations to every one and all for a vital project, so well executed that it still stands ten years after first publication, and will probably stand considerable more years before we even think about another edition.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* In fact, I can't remember a thing I had to do with it . . . I must not have been involved.

Sep 22, 2014, Twenty Years (Next Year)

Sometime in early 2015, **GDW** will have closed down 20 years ago.

The last year or so the company operated an a reduced staff, consisting of Frank Chadwick, David Nilsen, and several part-timers, which did not include me (I was technically employed as a contract worker, writing from home during evenings, and working days at a national office supply store.*

We had cut back on salaries and practically everyone took second jobs. We kept one graphic arts person (Brad MacDivett, I think) who worked part time hours at the office and a shipping clerk who worked two or three days a week preparing and shipping parcels.

Eventually, we decided to just close up shop, so I came back full time to help shut the place down, mainly by loading the paper salvage company truck that came once per day to

carry off the product we couldn't unload into the distribution network and the corrugated cardboard boxes.

As time passed, I found that the now empty storerooms echoed my footsteps as I walked through them . . . something I had also experienced in my parents house as I cleaned it out for sale as part of the estate at about the same time. I grew to really hate that sound. We managed to unload almost all of the RPG lines into distribution, but we had to dispose of some of the unassembled components of the board wargames . . . we sold the assembled games, but there was no way we could have done short print runs and hired assembly workers to get rid of everything.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* The last nine months of the company's existence, I was hired to work at the office, and had a desk, although I didn't use it much.

Oct 06, 2014, Underground

A few years ago, I was discussing something with a **Traveller** fan when I happened to mention the site at Cahokia in Illinois, near St Louis. The site is a large settlement that had thousands of inhabitants in the 10th century AD, and my correspondent, living in London at the time, was flabbergasted at the size of the town. He pointed out that this was larger then the Medieval cities of York or Nottingham at the time, and stated that "One never knows what is under your own feet." He resolved to visit the place if he ever got the chance.

A friend living in the city of Edinburgh, Scotland while assembling a list of places for me to visit, discovered several old Roman settlements in the area, part of the fortifications connected with the Roman settlement of Scotland—which it turns out was vastly more extensive than either of us had originally surmised. Edinburgh was a site far to the north of Roman settlement in the area, and yet was the site of numerous forts, fortlets, and seaports in what was normally considered far beyond Roman territory.

About thirty years after the Roman General Agricola defeated the Caledones at the battle of Mons Graupius, several hundred miles north of even the city of Edinburgh, the Emperor Hadrian built a wall to keep the raiding Scots out of Roman territory, but within a generation after the wall went up another Emperor (Antoninus) put up another wall a distance north of **Hadrian's Wall,** and used it as the basis for yet another campaign against the Scots, who had evidently taken the opportunity to get uppity again. The Romans eventually withdrew back to the site of **Hadrian's Wall** again, and after a couple of hundred years withdrew from Britain entirely

The upshot is that I am now planning yet another visit to yet another Roman site in Scotland, sometime in 2015 or after. Fascinating . . .

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Oct 20, 2014, Pushing 40

Traveller, will be 40 in 2017, and that fact would have flabbergasted any of the original creators who thought about that fact in 1977. I know I didn't think the game would still be around even 20 years after it's first publication until the late 1980s . . . and I would still have not believed anyone who told me that it would be published by several different companies

in several different editions.

Initially, at least, I tended to believe that RPGs were ephemeral efforts. Despite this, however, I tended to work on only a few games, focusing my efforts on one or two titles and not spreading my efforts around. Because **Traveller** was **GDW**'s first game*, I worked heavily on writing for it at first. It was almost a decade before we published a second RPG (**Twilight: 2000**) and that was where my second efforts went.

By 1985, however, it had become pretty clear to me that several of our RPGs would still be played for decades . . . even if we ceased publication of them, there would still be stalwarts who would continue to play them, passing on the tattered rulebooks like holy writ.

I was wrong about that, too, it would seem.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Practically . . . **En Garde!** was **GDW**'s first RPG, but that one was so strange (no referee, set in the 17th century) it doesn't really count.

Nov 03, 2014, The Web

One of the things that was created after **Traveller** was first published was the **World Wide Web.** The Web came about after the Internet was created, which was originally a military network. I first ran into the Internet on a visit to the **University of Illinois Computer Center** (which is famous), where **GDW** had a number of fans.* I saw a number of things, including my first e-mail (well, not mine exactly, as I didn't have access to the internet at that time). It was an e-mail addressed to me in care of one of the U of I students, and was a question about **Traveller**.

GDW began using computers as word processors in the early 1980s, but the phone lines to the office were so noisy that we could not have e-mail direct to the office I served as **GDW'**s e-mail liaison, where I would take e-mails to the office from home (printed out, at first, later saved to a floppy disc) and vice versa. We worked though **Genie** and **America Online** (and I still maintain the **AOL** e-mail address: *gdwgames@aol.com*), and a fair number of people are surprised to discover it still exists.

One of the first e-mail requests I got was a message asking if it would be OK if the **Traveller** *milieu* was scanned into text files and made available on the Internet—something which I had to decline, of course. This was to remain a sore point for years.

One of the last things I was assigned to do for **GDW** was to look into establishing a web page for **GDW,** which never got off the ground. I often wonder if that, like so many other things, might have made it possible for **GDW** to remain in business during the 1990s and after. Well never really know, I guess.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* One of them a former employee, who arranged for us to see some of the early computer games played there.

Nov 17, 2014, Things I've Forgotten

One thing I've noticed as I get older is that things tend to slip my mind—although the phenomenon started when I turned 30 or so rather then when I turned 60.*

The biggest thing I tend to forget lately is when I visit the grocery and forget to buy things I need rather desperately, but only actually need once every few months, like AA batteries or dish scrubbing thingies (which I still need, even though I have had a dishwasher in the apartment for 30 years). For some reason, I stopped carrying a notepad (or even a sheet of paper) a few years ago, and thus can't make a shopping list.**

Another thing I have forgotten is the extent of my miniatures collection. A few months ago, I wrote about disposing of items of the collection that I would never play (or get painted for that matter), and discovered that I had neglected to mention about half of the inventory.

I concluded long ago that this is not due to any aspect of my growing older . . . I've been forgetting things regularly since my 30s, as I mentioned earlier. I think it is only coming to my attention more and more because it is more and more annoying to forget minor little items as it becomes harder for me to get around (which is increasing as the years pass—I don't walk as fast as I used to even 10 years ago, due to my legs stiffening up.

I have almost always had trouble associating names with faces . . . at least since I was seven or eight years old . . . and this has not been increasing recently. I hope this continues, but I think eventually it will get worse. So my older siblings tell me, anyway.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* This was when I bought a third copy of the book **The Killer Angels,** because I couldn't remember if I owned it or not. I had read the book three times, but I couldn't remember if I had loaned it to a friend and not gotten it back when they left town. Turns out they had . . .

** Well, I can, but the odds are that Ill leave it at home, and won't have access to it while I'm in the grocery.

Dec 01, 2014, Learning To Design RPGs

You'd think that after nearly four decades of designing roleplaying games, The **GDW** staff would have picked up a pretty fair idea of how to go about it. You'd think we'd have gotten a pretty good idea of how to design a game after a single decade.

In my case, however, I'm still trying to figure out the basics of good game design after all the years I've spent doing it, and I still don't quite think I've gotten the hang of it . . . not totally, anyway.

Part of my problem is a case of writers block* combined with a tendency towards procrastination. This means that it takes me longer to create a rule book or an adventure, or anything connected with an RPG. Which means that over a given length of time, I create less product, which means my experience at creating is less than that of my peers in design, which means I learn less over the same amount of time.

Over the years, I tended to work on fewer games than my partners at **GDW**, (I focused on **Traveller**, then on **Twilight: 2000**, whereas Frank Chadwick worked on many times that number of systems.

Frank and Marc could turn out a new system every week if they wanted to (and Frank sometimes did). I tended to work with one system and stick with it, which is not a way to learn how to design systems. The best way to do that it to write them, and keep doing it.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* That I have discussed before.

Dec 15, 2014, Holidays

SJ Games had its annual Christmas dinner for employees on Tuesday the 9th, and I stuffed myself with steak and potatoes, which I don't eat too often these days. The main thing I noticed was that we had almost twice the number of people show up this season as did last season, and that most of those present were actual employees rather than spouses/etc. Last year we had a single long table in the main dining room of the steak house, but this year we had several smaller tables and our own dining room separate from the rest of the customers.

It was, therefore, a little quieter, and I caught more conversations than I did least year. Interestingly enough, people tend to "talk shop" about as often as they do during the day at work . . . we end up talking over the same sorts of things, but with different people than we do during normal work hours.

I had trouble recognizing some of the newer faces and connecting them with their jobs . . . fortunately, a new table of organization was just issued, and I managed to remember enough of the new hires to avoid embarrassing myself too badly. We started about 5:00 PM and ended between 7:30 and 8:00. All in all, a good time was had by all, and I enjoyed talking with some of the people I don't get to see that much of during the normal workday. I hope everyone out there has a similar holiday story to tell.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* I didn't look at my watch (phone, actually) when my ride decided it was time to leave.

Dec 29, 2014, Happy New Year!

Im writing this on Monday, December 29, 2014, but it will appear on Tuesday the 30th and the year will have only one more day before vanishing . . . so it is pretty much the end of 2014. I don't know about the rest of you, but I didn't manage to accomplish what I intended this year.

From what I know of people, most folks don't accomplish what they intend to in any given amount of time, be it a day, a month, a year or a decade. I started a novel in 2012, and didn't manage to complete it in 2013 or 2014. I barely managed to add a chapter in 2014, and at this rate I may finish it by 2020. I hope to finish it next year, and get to work on the other [mumble] projects I have sitting on my hard drive.*

When I went to Los Angeles (for an **Origins Game Convention** many years ago, there was a joke about screenplays: If you asked any five random people you met on the street, "*How's the screenplay going*?" at least four of them would answer in the affirmative. I'm convinced that anyone who owns a computer has at least started a novel/screenplay at some point.

I have determined to finish at least one non-gaming project in 2015. I'm going to actually try for two, but Ill be satisfied with finishing one.

Anyway, I hope every one of you and your loved ones and friends have a happy and prosperous New Year!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* At least one of these projects is leftover from before I owned a computer, and has been transferred from system to system over the last couple of decades.

2015

2015

Jan 12, 2015, How's It Going?

So far, the year is going fairly well for me. I've managed to do a little work on the novel I decided to finish in 2015, although I have discovered a means of losing time that I had forgotten—it seems computers still come with games automatically installed.

Freecell, Minesweeper, and (most important of all) **Solitaire**. There are about a dozen simple little games automatically installed on PCs . . . I had forgotten they existed, because I stopped playing them years ago. Until last week, when I was poking around on the programs installed on my computer, and discovered them again. I found one form of **Solitaire** irresistible—**Klondike** or some such thing (I don't remember the name because after wasting a week or so of free evenings on it, I decided to remove it from the computer).* When you win, it seems, it automatically sets you up with another deal, and the machine keeps score for you, so there is no real reason to stop. I found playing so simple and easy that I could spend hours messing with the little game, pretending that I was in a Yukon saloon gambling the gold dust that I had just panned from the river that day. I don't know why, but I found it tough to stop playing.

This had never been a problem with me before, and I wonder if it is all a part of getting older . . . Perhaps I was attracted to the story behind the game (the saloon in the Yukon, with the story of panning gold from the neighboring creeks and such).

I managed to complete a few paragraphs of the novel before I discovered the game, and haven't tried to write anything on it since. I haven't had any attractions to play any of the other forms of Solitaire on the computer—for some reason they don't seem as attractive to me.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Something I had never done before.

Jan 26, 2015, Times Past

Every once in a while, I read over something I wrote thirty or more years ago . . . back when I was starting out in the game design business. Naturally, I can only do this for certain rare documents—those more than thirty years old and these become more common as the years go by.

I notice two things: First, the older stuff generally sucks more than the newer stuff, although some of my oldest writings are pretty good, and some of my newer stuff is pretty awful.

To an extent, the general level of "*suckitude*" a particular piece achieves is related to the amount of time I had available to rewrite it way back when. The third or fourth time I went in and revised a particular piece of work, the better it ended up. Later work generally got about as good as it was going to get with the third or fourth pass, and it was not worth the effort involved in working on it more than three or four times.

Something else I noticed is that starting up on a project get easier as the years passed. I could often dive right in on something and get almost half to two thirds of the way through it before I hit a wall and had to quit for a while (something I could not do earlier in my career). Although, I still hit projects where I cannot for the life of me get a good solid start before puttering out.

I have yet to figure out why this should be. It does not seem to be related to my per-

petual writer's block (which I have discussed before).

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 09, 2015, Getting Rid of Old Stuff

Starting over my Christmas/New Years holiday break, I began looking through my "collection" of things with a view towards getting rid of some of them. My initial notion was that if I hadn't read something since I moved to Austin, I probably didn't need to keep it on my shelves any more.

I took a box off the shelf where I had stacked it when I moved in 2010, and decided to look through the contents.

As it turns out, the box contained mostly magazines related to gaming and books related to nothing in particular. The magazines were predominantly British wargaming magazines I had acquired in the 1980's and 1990's (**Wargames Illustrated, Miniature Wargames, Practical Wargamer,** and **Military Modeling**) along with about one copy per year of a railroad modeling magazine (which I bought because I always found model railroading a minor interest). The books tended to be science fiction that I had purchased in used bookstores for $0.10 to $0.75, and had been published from the late 1950s until the 1990s.

Being a literate soul, I began reading them, and found that in each magazine, there was some article that I really could not live without, and in each book I found something I valued. Some of the items I couldn't even remember reading before . . .

Anyway, after a few weeks of going slowly through the first box I opened, I found one or two paperback books I was willing to part with . . . and none of the magazines (except for a number of duplicate issues I felt I could sell off). At this rate, I think I will have a backpack full ready to take to the used bookstore in April or May. Sigh.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Feb 23, 2015, 70 Years Ago & Other Things

In 1945, 70 years ago yesterday (although at the time I write this, it's today) the **US Marine Corps** had landed on Iwo Jima and raised two flags atop the volcano on the island. Things get a little complicated, so I suggest people who don't know anything about the incident look into it elsewhere.*

Basically, the second flag raised was the one that ended up the most famous, although the first one was the one that got the greatest immediate attention. The second one was raised while the scene was still under fire from the enemy, however, so it took as much courage and bravery to hoist it as did the first one. Read the book and gain a new respect for everyone involved.

Another item today was the airing of the John Wayne film **Sands of Iwo Jima**, which involved three of the survivors of the second flag hoisting party (along with John Wayne, a few other actors, and several veterans from the landing on Iwo Jima). It's a nice movie, and a place where war buffs can see one of the rare Japanese tanks to appear on film, as well as several genuine landing craft, flamethrower tanks, and similar equipment from WWII and slightly post-war. It is kind of rare for genuine equipment to appear on-screen in a Hollywood movie, but the film-makers had the cooperation of the **USMC** and could make use of black-and-white combat footage, since the movie was filmed in black-and-white.

There were two recent movies about Iwo Jima (**Flags of Our Fathers** and **Letters from Iwo Jima** the first of which follows the American soldiers during the battle, and the second film following the Japanese soldiers. Both were directed by Clint Eastwood, and both are very realistic as films go.

Hunt them down—they are both worth the effort.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* For those who know nothing about the incident, I suggest reading **Flags of our Fathers** by James Bradley, son of one of the men who raised the second flag.

Mar 09, 2015, Wind and Weather

I realize that what I've been through in the last few days pale to insignificance compared to what many of the readers have been subjected to. Thursday the local school district declared that they would be closed due to weather—there was a winter storm warning for the local area, and when I got up Thursday morning, the local neighborhood by my apartment was under a light coating of ice. I ordinarily would have gone into work on a Thursday, but we had been instructed not to come in if the trip would have been risky . . . and for Austin, Texas, a 0.1 inch coating of freezing rain is enough to shut the city down. As I get older, the notion of walking on glare ice is less and less appealing to me, and the bus system was operational, but could not guarantee they would run on schedule.

Friday and Saturday continued the rain, although the temperature rose a bit. I decided to remain home, and spent the weekend in my apartment, except for periodic trips to the mailbox (which is less than a block away) and a walk to the grocery store (which is two blocks away).

I spent the weekend working on getting **JTAS** ready to go, and writing a short **Daily Illuminator** in honor of Leonard Nimoy.

Nothing compared to what the readership in Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Colorado (and other places) have been subjected to. I'm getting old, I guess.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Mar 23, 2015, What I Did Over the Last Couple of Weekends

I received a number of gifts for my birthday recently (March 7). One was a book (**Of Dice and Men**) and the second was a set of DVDs (**A Game of Thrones Season 4**)

Of Dice and Men was written by David Ewalt (who assures us that he is a 15th level cleric) and describes his history with **D&D** as well as going into a fairly detailed history of the game and its players.* I read the book in a single sitting (it arrived Friday and I started reading it Saturday afternoon and had finished it before sunset. It is an excellent history of the game, although it does not cover enough details to satisfy some, judging from some reviews I have read.

A Game of Thrones Season 4 consists of 10 episodes, plus commentaries and a few special features such as a discussion of the battle depicted in episode 9, several bloopers and deleted scenes, and a round table discussion of the characters who died in season 4 (evidently the large number of character deaths caused the producers to think this might be of interest to the show's fans). I spent several hours each day over the last weekend (the

day after the DVD arrived . . . evidently it was delayed en route), and finished off all of the episodes and most of the commentaries before the weekend was over. Evidently I can still read faster than I can watch.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* And a few others – **GDW**'s games *En Garde!* and **Traveller** are mentioned, as well as designers Frank Chadwick and Marc Miller . . . my contributions to gaming seem not important enough to merit mention.

Apr 06, 2015, Weather

The weather in Austin, Texas has been rather unseasonable of late. For the last several weeks it has been either under or over the average temperature, although it has been several weeks since things got below freezing. Right now it is typical Spring temperature, although the rain is a little slack so we are still technically under a drought.

In Austin it seldom snows for very long, instead what we tend to get is a few hours of freezing rain/sleet which makes it nearly impossible to travel on the streets without risking life and limb. Rarely, it will stay below freezing for a day or two, which tends to shut the city down and start people panicking like Armageddon was approaching. Things have settled down to lows in the 60s F in the middle of the night until shortly after sunrise, at which pint the temperatures slowly rise to 70 or 80 F by early afternoon, meaning I take a jacket in the morning on my way to work, but usually do not wear it in the late afternoon when I go home.

Compared to what some other people are getting, I consider myself extremely lucky weatherwise. I haven't had to risk walking on glare ice since last year, and I'm not sure my right leg can stand the strain . . . it tends to lose balance fairly easily because diabetes has robbed me of most sensation from the instep forward. And what little sensation I still have in both feet is sometimes lost to diabetic neuropathy, the "pins and needles" effect so familiar to most sufferers of type 2 diabetes. I need to walk for half an hour or so to work some of the kinks out, by which time I begin to tire in both legs. Sometimes I recover the use of both legs and can continue for quite a while. Sometimes I need to sit down and recover the use of both legs.

I have taken to carrying a folding umbrella and a thin plastic poncho for use when I have to sit and it is raining. Having to sit in the rain can be rather uncomfortable when there is a cold wind, especially since most bus stops in Austin seem to be built under the assumption that the passenger will need shelter from the sun rather than the rain

A few more weeks, however, and things will be hot. Sometimes very hot. The umbrella comes in handy for protection from the sun on days like that.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Apr 20, 2015, Out of It

I realized, a few years ago, that I was pretty much out of touch with what was happening in RP gaming. I used to be at least marginally acquainted with what was going on in the industry, largely due to my talking with the movers and shakers in the industry at least two or three times a year. I did this at the annual conventions (**Origins** and **Gen-Con** and

others) and at the **GAMA Trade Show** held in Las Vegas every year.

In the last year or so, however, I realized that I was not as well up on what was happening in the industry as I thought. One of my jobs at **SJ Games** is keeping track of the company games library, a collection of titles of roleplaying games, board wargames, adventures, books, comics, and magazines from the early 1970s until last week. I have become acquainted with a large number of items I had never heard of before, and read a number of titles I had heard of but never looked at before. I realize that my view of the industry has almost always been out of date, and my notions of what was happening in my own industry were hopelessly out of date.

The main reason for this, I have concluded, is that I circulated with a small circle of friends, and we tended to not talk shop . . . who wants to talk about the industry when you have so many other interesting topics for discussion, like what really happened on the first day of Gettysburg, or what really sank the **Bismarck.**

I am even farther out of touch nowadays, due to the fact that I don't attend conventions and trade shows as often as I used to. It has made me even more insulated from what's happening in my industry.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 04, 2015, My Health—An Update for Interested Readers

I haven't updated the readership on the state of my health in quite a while. This is largely because nothing much has changed.

My Heart: After the quadruple bypass operation following the heart attack of 2010, I haven't had any further heart-related problems, except for occasional high blood pressure. The doctor continues to shift medications, trying to find something that lowers it without undue side effects. My weight is slowly dropping, now being about 275 lbs, lower than it has been in a while, but still higher than the insurance tables indicate is good for me.

I continue to be a Type 2 diabetic, and have to take two types of insulin to keep my blood glucose under control. I have this more or less under control, but my weight and blood pressure are too high to be confident of my continued good health. I still have occasional bouts of high blood sugar, but I haven't had a low blood sugar spell in more than a year. My feet are still subject to occasional bouts of "pins and needles" diabetic neuropathy, and sometimes I cannot feel my toes (which can make walking difficult, especially on uneven or slick surfaces). I have occasional spells where I have trouble keeping my balance, but this is mostly when climbing stairs (which I have to do slowly nowadays, and try to avoid if possible)

I also cannot run any more, which can make catching a bus kind of a problem.

So far, however, I've managed to avoid needing a cane or a walker, and the last time I was in a wheelchair was when they let me out of the hospital after the surgery. In general, I feel OK, except for a low-level cold I picked up a week or so ago, which has plugged up my left ear.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

May 18, 2015, A Phone Call

I'll be attending the **Claymore 2015 Wargaming Convention**, hosted by the **Southeast Scotland Wargames Club** on August 1, 2015. Flying there proved to be more of an adventure than I like to have. It seems that the excellent deal I got on a flight there was canceled when the airline decided to drop service to the city of Edinburgh.

Fortunately, the airline decided to replace my flight with one to Glasgow, which just happens to be near Edinburgh, and booked the replacement flight for the same days in and out. Unfortunately, I had to telephone the airline and confirm the flight details.

I don't really like dealing with people on the phone, especially where I need to produce every detail of the transaction, several times.

First, the number I called turned out to be available only certain hours, so my first call meant that I had to work my way through several layers of automated telephone directories, eventually learning that I had chosen to call after every living human had gone home for the day. I called back the next day.

This brought my second surprise: the number I had called was for another airline, which, it seems, provides customer service for my original airline. I learned that after spending nearly twenty minutes in line waiting for a living operator. When I finally got one, I gave my flight number and discovered that my flight didn't exist . . . on the computer of the second airline . . . and it took several minutes for the operator to realize I had book the flight on the first airline.

Several minutes of waiting in line ended with me finally talking to someone who worked for the correct airline. Here I discovered that unlike my original notion,* the flight to Edinburgh had been canceled (and the service to that city also cancelled), and the original airline had decided to offer me the option of flying to Glasgow, Scotland instead (the option was a full refund and cancellation of the flight). After consulting the atlas in my mind, I remembered that Glasgow is about 45 miles from Edinburgh, and accepted the new flight, which the airline offered me at the same price.

I then had to wait several more minutes while the helpful clerk confirmed my flight to Glasgow, reserved seats for me, and looked up the arrival and departure times for me.

After several emails to the person who was to meet me at the airport in Edinburgh (he now has to take a bus to Glasgow, a trip of about an hour, take a bus to Glasgow international airport and meet me there), the situation is solved. All of this assumes that my flight to Glasgow is not forced to divert to Belfast.)

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Which was someone had typed the wrong flight number when sending me an email about a time change in my original flight.

May 27, 2015, A Little Extra Water

Over the last weekend (Memorial Day weekend) there was some flooding in Austin and parts of surrounding municipalities. The events were covered (in some cases) on live TV and (since the matter was of some small interest to me) I watched things as the news broke. Several other cities in Texas also had pretty massive flooding, but my local station covered events in Austin almost exclusively.

The major flooding in downtown Austin occurred on Sixth Street pretty much downtown, and several storefronts, apartments and condos were flooded out. Since several of the larger buildings kept power during the flooding, a number of the inhabitants provided live

coverage of such interesting events as dumpsters floating down the street and pedestrians stranded on islands of relative safety.

I managed to escape without damage to my quarters and belongings, although I did get pretty well soaked on Tuesday following the weekend.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 15, 2015, Things Past

A new channel opened up in Austin, Texas recently, devoted to old TV shows. I hadn't seen some of them in many years, and it was interesting to view them again after nearly 50 years (in some cases longer).

Several of them hadn't aged well, some of them were as good as they always were. My biggest disappointment was **Knight Rider**, which starred David Hasselhoff and a talking car voiced by William Daniels. Since I always liked William Daniels, I was a regular viewer back in the day simply to hear the man talk. I have no clue what kind of car was used in the show—I didn't care for automobiles back then and I still don't. I failed to notice, however, how brainless the plots were, and how bad the acting was (with the exception of Mr. Daniels). I watched a couple of episodes and decided not to bother with the rest of them.

On the other hand, I found a show called **The Name of the Game** to be as good as it always was. Staring an ensemble cast including Robert Stack, Tony Franciosa, and Gene Barry as workers at a publishing company pursuing criminals, politicians, socialites, industrial espionage, medical fraud, and such through the late 1960s. The show had an enormous budget for a television programs, and episodes ran 90 minutes. Directors such as Stephen Bochco and Stephen Spielberg got their starts directing episodes, and almost every actor in Hollywood made a guest appearance. I still like the show and watch every episode I can catch.

I was never a real fan of **Murder She Wrote a**nd I have not gone out of my way to view episodes of this (albeit popular) show. **Quantum Leap** is as enjoyable as it ever was, and I watch every episode of the "**Stunt Sunday**" showings.

Other shows include **Adam 12, The Real McCoys, Miami Vice, The Bionic Woman,** and **Hart to Hart.**

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jun 29, 2015, You Can't Be Too Careful

Especially not these days. This was brought home to me rather severely recently when I found it necessary to solicit emergency funds through **Paypal.com**. I posted an announcement of my needs on **Facebook** and on the **Traveller Mailing List**, and didn't think any more about it. My message had a couple of typos (including my signature as "Loren Wise-3man*) and included the suggestion that people who wished to donate use an email address that I seldom use for **Paypal** donations.

Several people pointed this out, and within an hour of posting my message to both places I received several emails asking if the appeal was genuine or if my account had been "hacked."

I had forgotten, in the length of time since I had appealed for money online, that a common fraud is for the crook to pose as someone desperately needing money and using a

fake email address for a donation. Usually, the request is from one person to another single person, but speculation was rampant on both sites about if I was genuinely in need (which I was) or if my email had been hacked.

A number of my fans wrote that the email address I had given was indeed genuine, and several quoted my response to personal emails that the appeal was legit. Many people suggested waiting to donate until the matter could be investigated, and a large number of people evidently did (donations are still rolling in, several days after I posted my first appeal). I had not thought I was causing such a kerfuffle, but I cannot blame anyone for being extra cautious these days. One never knows.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Of all the typos I wished I had caught, this one is high on the list.

Jul 13, 2015, Back to Edinburgh

On August 1, 2015, I'll be visiting Edinburgh, Scotland and attending the **Claymore Wargames Convention** put on every year by the **Southeast Scotland Wargames Club**. Anybody within one jump of the location and is interested of touching base with me should plan on attending.

While I'm in town, I'm going to hit a few of the local sights I missed last time I was in town, including parts of York, bits of the **Antonine Wall** (which is not in as good a shape as **Hadrian's Wall**—evidently the bits I'll be seeing don't even have decent bus service). York is not really a part of Edinburgh (or Scotland, for that matter) but people who like Roman remains, Viking remains, or Medieval/Dark Ages remains should definitely visit if they get the chance, as all of them are present to some degree. I will also be landing and departing through Glasgow, this time, which is someplace else I've never boon.

I look forward to meeting the folks I met last time I was in town, as well as any new folks I happen to run into. Seeya there!

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Jul 27, 2015, Hot, Hot, Hot

It hasn't been too awfully hot in Austin, Texas recently, but it has been climbing up gradually, and (like a large part of the rest of the country) things are getting hotter. Today was the first day in Austin that it hit 100 degrees Fahrenheit (which is 30 something Centigrade . . . I don't feel up to doing the computations right now). Highs for the rest of the week are supposed to be 100 or more, with the heat index being even hotter.

Now, 100 degrees is not as hot as it gets in Austin . . . it can (and probably will) get hotter before the summer is over with. But 100 degrees Fahrenheit is when the police and medical folks down here start to worry about people falling prey to heat-related maladies, and the power company starts worrying about power consumption rising as people start cranking their air conditioning to the Little America setting.

Some years ago my sister bought me a water jug that fits in my backpack and keeps a liter of water relatively cool, but also is collapsible and folds up as I consume the water, so it doesn't take up too much space as I drink it. Interestingly enough, the heat wave that is hitting the eastern half of the USA will bring 90+ degree temperatures (closing on 100 is

some places) to Illinois, so I hope my sister has a similar water container available to her.

Other places in the country often go above 100 degrees (and have been doing so for weeks) . . . and the inhabitants there are used to such things. In a way I'm lucky that I don't have to put up with such things.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Aug 10, 2015, UK Television

Having returned from my recent trip to Edinburgh, I thought it might prove informative to tell the readership a bit about television in the UK.

The place I was staying was in an area with lousy reception, so my host had to avail himself of cable . . . provided by the **Virgin Company**, who seem to do everything these days.

My main problem with viewing was figuring out how to work the remote controls, which took some experimentation despite the clear and concise instructions supplied me by the owner of the TV set.

The programs seemed to be of two basic types: rebroadcast versions of American TV and British/European programming. The American programs were provided in giant lumps of old seasons plus reasonably recent episodes. I saw advertisements of upcoming programs that I had watched just before I left Austin, to premier in a few weeks (or, in some cases, a few days). I watched about seven or eight shows in a row on some stations, often filling an entire evening with **NCIS** or some recent American show.

I also watched several British movies and documentaries on WWII and caught part of a European production about Pharaoh Tutankhamen, which seemed to have been largely taken from the writers imagination, as it involved the Boy King sneaking out of the palace and moving among the inhabitants of a village, in order to learn about the conditions of his people. Sadly, I didn't view the end of this piece.

I found British commercials almost identical to American ones, except for different products.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Aug 24, 2015, The Antonine Wall

One of the sites I visited in Scotland a few weeks ago was the **Antonine Wall**, built by the Romans to help control the natives in Scotland (who weren't known as the Scots yet—the Scotti were actually from Ireland, and showed up later in history).

The best preserved site on the **Antonine Wall** today is **Rough Castle**, so called because it was rebuilt during the early middle ages (and later turned into a farmhouse, which was later burned to the ground), which means that there's little to see except the remains of the ditches and v-shaped fortifications of the wall (which are impressive).

Finding Rough Castle was a bit of a trek, because nobody in any of the surrounding local communities seemed to know where it was located, and the map we had downloaded from the internet was flawed in several ways. The cab driver we hired had to call his headquarters for GPS settings twice, and only managed to get us lost twice during the trip.

One advantage of getting lost the second time was the fact that we saw what I believe to an English Fallow Deer grazing by the deserted country road. One thing I also noticed

was that British tourists seem to take their dogs along for their walks in the countryside. We saw five or six cars in the car park where we eventually arrived, and all of them had dogs as part of the passengers.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, JTAS

Sep 07, 2015, A New Phone

It is interesting how the technology we depend on can fail us. I lost my cell phone Friday afternoon . . . the device itself simply stopped working. I thought it was the recharger, and went to a local electronics store in search of a replacement.

I discovered that the problem was not in the recharger . . . that would have been too simple. The problem was in the connector between the cell phone and the recharger. It had developed corrosion, which prevented the electrical charge from getting through. This meant that no matter how long I left the recharger connected to the phone, the phone didn't pick up a charge, and eventually, the battery ran out.

It took me most of an afternoon to find this out. It took me about half an hour to buy a replacement cell phone (I decided to go with another TracFone, and found one for about half the price of the first one.)

That I got home, assembled the new phone and plugged it in to charge the battery. Following the directions on the little red card that came with the new phone, I went online and discovered that it was impossible for me to re-register the phone under the old number – because in order to enter the serial number from the old phone, I had to turn the old phone on, something I could no longer do.

I ended up calling the **TracFone** people and spend about two hours convincing them I needed to speak to a living human, then spent another hour getting the various numbers and passwords required.

In short, it took me longer to get the new phone activated with the old number that it had for me to buy the new phone.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Sep 21, 2015, First Day of Fall

Today (Tuesday 22 September) is the first day of Fall or the last day of Summer, although technically it is both. This doesn't mean much of a change in the weather in Austin it's supposed to remain about the same as it has the last couple of weeks, which is hot and dry although not quite as hot and not quite as dry as it was a month ago.

The temperatures are supposed to be in the low 90's Fahrenheit and there is a small chance of rain, although not much. Back in Illinois, where I have family, it is supposed to be in the 70s and there is a greater chance of rain. I'm feeling improved from the great heat of the last few weeks, and feel les tired and more energetic. I've managed to loose 20 pounds in the last few months, and this makes me feel a sense of accomplishment. I now weigh less than I have in almost ten years.

As to how I have accomplished this weight loss, I can't say. I've been eating less lately, but I haven't really been exercising more (which are the twin secrets to weight loss . . . eat less and exercise).

I'm looking forward to the temperature dropping a little more over the next month or

so. September is not the hottest month in Austin, but it's not the coolest either.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Oct 05, 2015, My Health– A Report

Basically, I still have type II diabetes, and still take medication for high blood pressure, but there are a couple of good things to report:

I've managed to retain control over my blood sugar levels, and haven't had too high or too low test results in quite some time.

I've lost about 25 pounds in the last year. I can't tell it from looking, but the scales say I'm 269 pounds instead of 295 or so, which is good. I can't think of anything specific I've been doing except eat less and exercise . . . and I haven't been doing much of the latter. This means that my blood pressure is lower than it has been, although it is still higher than my doctor would like to see.

The hole that has been in my foot for over two years now is almost completely vanished. It is now about 1/16th inch across (formerly it was almost 3/4 of an inch) and some days does not ooze blood at all. There is no longer any pain/discomfort associated with it, and I look forward to it being completely gone. Medical advice is to keep doing what I have been doing, and don't try to cut away any of the tissue surrounding it.

The pins and needles sensation in my other foot, another side effect of diabetes, remains, but is less that it has been. The lack of sensation in my left foot remains, however, and I still have trouble walking, especially on slick surfaces like sheet ice (which, fortunately, is not too common in Austin, Texas) or mud.

Basically, I'm doing OK, and hope to improve as I lose more weight.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

Oct 19, 2015, Changes

A few years ago, I had reason to avail myself of this nation's intercity bus system and travel a few hundred miles on personal business. I noticed one salient feature about my fellow passengers: even those whose choice of luggage was a trash bag had a cell phone. This was before I had acquired one, and was still existing off of public phones. This was also before public phones pretty much ceased to exist.

About a year or so later I managed to find a really cheap system for cellphones* and began to notice that public phones suddenly began to be bought out by companies that assumed I wanted to call some place in Mexico. Most recently I have noticed that even these have begun to vanish, mostly locating themselves to the insides of corner groceries, next to the checkout lanes (where presumably people found it more difficult to rob them). My co-passengers on the bus seem to have acquired smart phones that can do several things besides make phone calls, and many of them have combined themselves with small computers. I'm waiting for the first sign of a surgically-implanted phone/computer . . . I'm not too sure what's holding those up. Most people seem to have installed earpieces in their ears, and occasionally have the volume turned up high enough that I can hear their music even though I'm not actually connected.

These are the most noticeable changed I have noticed in America so far. I'll continue to take notes and report.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Mine currently costs me $10 for my most recent phone and about $7 a month.

Nov 02, 2015, My Weekend

I spent a sizable part of my weekend playing an old computer game that hadn't seen the light of day in several years for reasons not really expressible. I suppose the main reason is that the disc was stuck in the drive of a machine I haven't used in quite a while, and only fired up because I needed some files that were stored on the hard drive.

When not messing about with a computer, I spent part of my time watching the live weather coverage of the flash floods that were endemic in the region for the last few days, due both to **Hurricane Patricia** (the remnants of which came through central Texas recently) and a second storm front that seemed to want to hang around for a while. My apartment wasn't flooded out, but several neighborhoods flooded last May and last Halloween received repeat performances from **Jupiter Pluvius.***

October has been slightly warmish in and around Austin, but still has been cooler that the previous month, with highs in the 80's rather than the 90's, and somewhat more rain than previously.

I also saw Monica Stephens on television, being interviewed as one of the survivors of the Halloween floods of last year who got wet this year as well. It took about two minutes to answer the interviewer's questions, none of which I remember right now.

Loren Wiseman
Editor, **JTAS**

* Jupiter Pluvius being the Roman god of rain . . . odd that I haven't mentioned him in years.

2017

February 16, 2017: Loren Wiseman

We learned today that Loren Wiseman had passed away, apparently from heart failure.

Loren was one of game design's earliest "greats." He was a founder of **Game Designers Worksho**p and a co-creator of **Traveller**, the science-fiction roleplaying game that set the standard for all the others. He was also a good friend.

He was inducted into the **Origins Hall of Fame** in 2003.

Loren worked with **Steve Jackson Games** for many years: writing **GURPS Traveller**, editing the **GT** line, and creating an online incarnation of the notable **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society.**

Loren is depicted, along with the late Mike Ford, on the **INWO** "Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow" card.

He'll be missed.

Steve Jackson

2017

Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow

As this group's action, you may automatically take over any *Gadget* Resource from your hand. You must then link it to the Evil Geniuses. Resources linked to them cannot be unlinked . . . they are lost or captured if the Evil Geniuses are!

2/2

RESI 6

Violent, Weird

Science

Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow

Game professionals work at their respective companies, but conventions are an excuse for them to get together, update everyone on company and personal exploits, and sometimes just make up outrageous stories.

Loren Wiseman (then with GDW) and Jordan Weisman (then at FASA) spent some time together after hours and out of their combined imaginations they dreamed up an organization: Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow. The idea especially resonated with Loren and he adopted it as his personal theme: he inserted the tagline on letters; he printed up personal business cards. Many, even most, game designers knew of Loren's strange affection for this unusual idea. The organization even had a Mission Statement: "Encourage growth in all sectors by ensuring the development of integrated cross-functional resources and crush all opposition by whatever means necessary."

When Steve Jackson Games entered the collectible card game arena—with Illuminati, New World Order in 1994—someone there remembered Evil Geniuses and suggested it would make an appropriate card. The letter went out to Loren (for those were the days of letters).

Meanwhile, Loren loved to share his ideas. When Mike Krause joined GDW's marketing department, the story of the Evil Geniuses came up, and Mike was duly inducted into the organization. When the letter arrived, Loren recruited Mike into a posed picture (for those were also the days of photographs) and sent it back. Steve Jackson's people gave it to artist Shea Ryan, who produced a suitable image to be colorized by Jeff Koke, to be turned it into the Rare NWO card: Evil Geniuses For A Better Tomorrow.

But there is more to the story...

GDW closed its doors in 1996, and Loren moved on to Steve Jackson Games to supervise the **GURPS** version of **Traveller** and edit the **Journal Of The Travellers' Aid Society Online**. He became part of their corporate structure. And he brought with him his Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow. He recruited John M. Ford, an established science-fiction writer, to pen **Traveller** supplements for **GURPS** and **Traveller** articles for **JTAS**. Somehow, over the course of 15 years at **Steve Jackson Games**, the identification of the image on the Illuminati card morphed into John M. Ford and Loren Wiseman, erasing the original identity of Mike Krause. Someone must have thought it made for better stories: it did, and it still does.

John M. Ford adopted his evil genius persona with a vengeance. In the days of **Pyramid Online**, Ford used to create a new signature line for every one of his posts with a unique tag line to complete "Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow: Creators of... <insert thing here>. At some point, he stated that the motto of the organization was: "It's all right, we're watching."

His machinations as an evil genius culminated, years after his demise, in Steve Jackson's death announcement for Loren Wiseman, which included this line: Loren is depicted, along with the late Mike Ford, on the INWO "Evil Geniuses for a Better Tomorrow" card.

Yet this is clearly untrue, as anyone looking at the card can tell you. The evil genius next to Loren is not Ford, but Krause.

So what exactly did evil genius Mike Krause do to be erased (or erase himself) from the annals of the society, except for that one lone mis-identified picture on a Rare card in a game from more than 20 years ago?

Afterword

I first met Loren Wiseman more than forty years ago: he was one of the small group who played games in the **University Union at Illinois State University,** and a fountain of knowledge about history in general and ancient history specifically. When Frank Chadwick, Rich Banner, and I created **Game Designers' Workshop**, we immediately added Loren to our partnership because he was a solid, dependable, and insightful friend. I have never regretted being in business with Loren.

Loren designed the fifth game published by **GDW: Eagles, Rome on the Rhine Frontier, AD 15.** He had a catchy concept: retrieving lost Roman legion standards (the Eagles) from the Germanic tribes, and he did an excellent job that made us proud. We were equally proud (and a bit jealous) when **Avalon Hill** picked up the game and published it under their banner. He followed up with **Pharsalus**, a board wargame of the Roman Civil War 48 BC in 1977.

Loren did a variety of jobs at **GDW** and they shaped everyone's perception of him. He ran the warehouse at a time when everything was done with pen and paper and by hand. When we created the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society**, he became its editor.

Loren also was the line developer for **Twilight: 2000**. The process at **GDW** was for the designer to write the text, but the developer brought together that text and some draft diagrams and some art needs, typeset it, and then made sure it was properly published. It also fell to Loren to design titles in the series (out of 48 supplementary titles, he is credited with primary design on 16, and shared design on 4 more; and his name fails to appear on only two).

After **GDW** closed its doors (in 1995), Loren moved to **Steve Jackson Games** in a variety of roles, including editor of their **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** online edition.

Along the way, Loren was recognized for his excellence and expertise: with the **H G Wells Award** for **Going Home** (1986), and the **H G Wells Award** three years running for the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** (1979-1980-1981). In 2004, Loren received perhaps the highest of honors within the gaming community: he was inducted into the **Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame**, and the above recounting of his credits gives some insight into why.

But I remember Loren as a friend and a game player. I remember he and I both in a board game competition at **GenCon** many years ago. I rarely play games, and so I was gratified to make the finals, but in the end Loren beat me. That is what the industry he loved is about: friendly competition, with an emphasis on "friendly."

Marc Miller

Design Credits-Loren Wiseman

Loren Wiseman designed his first game in 1973, and over the next forty-some years he participated in the publication of more than a hundred titles.

Design: Loren is credited as the primary or sole designer for 37 titles by GDW Game Designers' Workshop and SJG Steve Jackson Games. He has shared design credit for another 46 titles, including shared credit (with Don Greenwood) for **Caesar's Legions** (based on his **Eagles** from GDW) published by Avalon Hill.

Development: Loren was better known as a developer for the **Traveller** and **Twilight: 2000** game systems, with sole development credit for 25 titles, and shared development credit for another 11 titles.

Editing. Loren was best known as the award-winning editor of the **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society**. He edited the original **JTAS** from GDW from 1979 to 1985, and continued as editor (variously titled Managing Editor, Consulting Editor, or Contributing Editor) for **Challenge Magazine** through its final issue in 1995. When Steve Jackson Games produced the GURPS edition of **Traveller,** Loren became editor of the revived **JTAS Online** from its inception in 2000 though its final issue in 2015.

Overall, Loren's writing includes (full or partial) design credit on 82 titles, and development credit for an additional 48. He edited 77 bimonthly or quarterly issues of **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society** (and its successor **Challenge Magazine**) at GDW, and then 449 weekly and later bi-weekly issues of **JTAS Online** from 2000 to 2015.

Wiseman was recognized for his excellence and expertise with the H G Wells Award for "Twilight: 2000 Going Home" (1986), and the H G Wells Award three years running for the "Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society" (1979-1980-1981). In 2004, Loren received the highest of honors within the gaming community: he was inducted into the Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame, and the above recounting of his credits gives some insight into the rationale.

Primary Design Credit (37 titles):

1973	Salem Witch Trials
1974	Eagles
1977	Pharsalus
1980	Traveller Supplement 6- 76 Patrons
1981	Traveller Book 0- Introduction To Traveller
1981	Traveller Double Adventure 4a- Marooned
1981	Traveller Double Adventure 4b- Marooned Alone
1982	Traveller Adventure 7- Broadsword
1985	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Going Home
1988	2300 AD Sourcebook- Colonial Atlas.
1988	2300 AD Sourcebook- Ground Vehicle Guide.
1988	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Howling Wilderness
1988	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Mediterranean Cruise
1989	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Boomer
1989	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- Heavy Weapons Guide
1989	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Return To Warsaw
1990	Merc: 2000 Core Rules
1990	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- White Eagle
1991	Merc: 2000 Sourcebook- Gazetteer
1991	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Bangkok
1991	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- Infantry Weapons of the World
1991	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- NATO Combat Vehicle Handbook,
1991	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- Nautical/Aviation Handbook
1992	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- Heavy Weapons Handbook
1992	Twilight: 2000 Referee's Screen
1993	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Operation Crouching Dragon
1994	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Rendezvous in Krakow (Vistula Epic 1)
1998	GURPS Traveller Core Rules
2010	Traveller Deckplans- 20-Ton Launch
2010	Traveller Deckplans- 30-ton Ship's Boat
2010	Traveller Deckplans- 30-ton Slow Boat
2010	Traveller Deckplans- 40-ton Pinnace
2010	Traveller Deckplans- 40-ton Slow Pinnace
2010	Traveller Deckplans- 600-ton Subsidized Liner
2010	RPG Floorplans- Private Railroad Car, 1900-1935
2010	RPG Floorplans- Roman Taverns, ca. 79 AD
2010	RPG Floorplans- Small Hotel, 1900-1940

Shared Design Credit (42 titles):

1975	Caesar's Legions
1980	Traveller Supplement 7- Traders & Gunboats
1981	Traveller Supplement 8- Library Data (A-M)
1982	The Traveller Adventure
1982	Traveller Supplement 11- Library Data (N-Z)
1983	Traveller Module 1- Tarsus (boxed)
1984	Traveller Alien Module 2- K'kree
1984	Twilight: 2000 V1.0 Core Rules
1985	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Black Madonna
1985	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Free City of Krakow

1985	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- Pirates of the Vistula
1985	Twilight: 2000 Adventure- The Ruins of Warsaw
1985	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- US Army Vehicle Guide
1986	Traveller Alien Module 7- Hivers
1986	Twilight: 2000 Sourebook- RDF Sourcebook
1987	2300 AD Sourcebook- Ships of the French Arm.
1987	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- Soviet Vehicle Design
1988	2300 AD Sourcebook- Equipment Guide.
1988	Space: 1889 Core Rules
1989	2300 AD Sourcebook- Earth/Cybertech
1989	Space: 1889 Adventure Anthology- Tales from the Ether
1989	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- NATO Vehicle Guide
1990	2300 AD Adventure- Rotten to the Core.
1990	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- American Combat Vehicles Handbook
1990	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- Soviet Combat Vehicles Handbook
1990	Twilight: 2000 Sourcebook- Twilight Encounters
1992	Dark Conspiracy Adventure- Among The Dead
1993	Traveller: The New Era- Core Rules
1993	Traveller: The New Era Sourcebook- Path of Tears
1993	Traveller: The New Era Sourcebook- Players' Forms
1993	Traveller: The New Era- Brilliant Lances
1993	Traveller: The New Era- Fire Fusion & Steel
1993	Twilight: 2000 v2.2 Core Rules
1994	Traveller: The New Era Sourcebook- Star Vikings
1994	Traveller: The New Era- Smash & Grab
1994	Traveller: The New Era- World Tamers Handbook
1995	Traveller: The New Era Sourcebook- Aliens of the Rim
2001	GURPS Traveller Alien Races 4
2001	GURPS Traveller Modular Cutter
2001	GURPS Traveller Planetary Survey 1 Kamsii
2001	GURPS Traveller Planetary Survey 2 Denuli
2001	GURPS Traveller Planetary Survey 5 Tobibak

Editor

1979-1985 **Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society**, Game Designers' Workshop. 24 issues. Editor.

1985-1995 **Challenge Magazine**. Game Designers' Workshop. 57 issues (numbered 25 through 77). Variously: Editor (2 issues), Managing Editor (18 issues), Associate Editor (13 issues), Consulting Editor (22 issues). Apparently uncredited on two issues.

2000-2015 **JTAS Online**. Steve Jackson Games. 475 issues (weekly Jan 2000 through Aug 2001; biweekly thereafter). Editor.

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