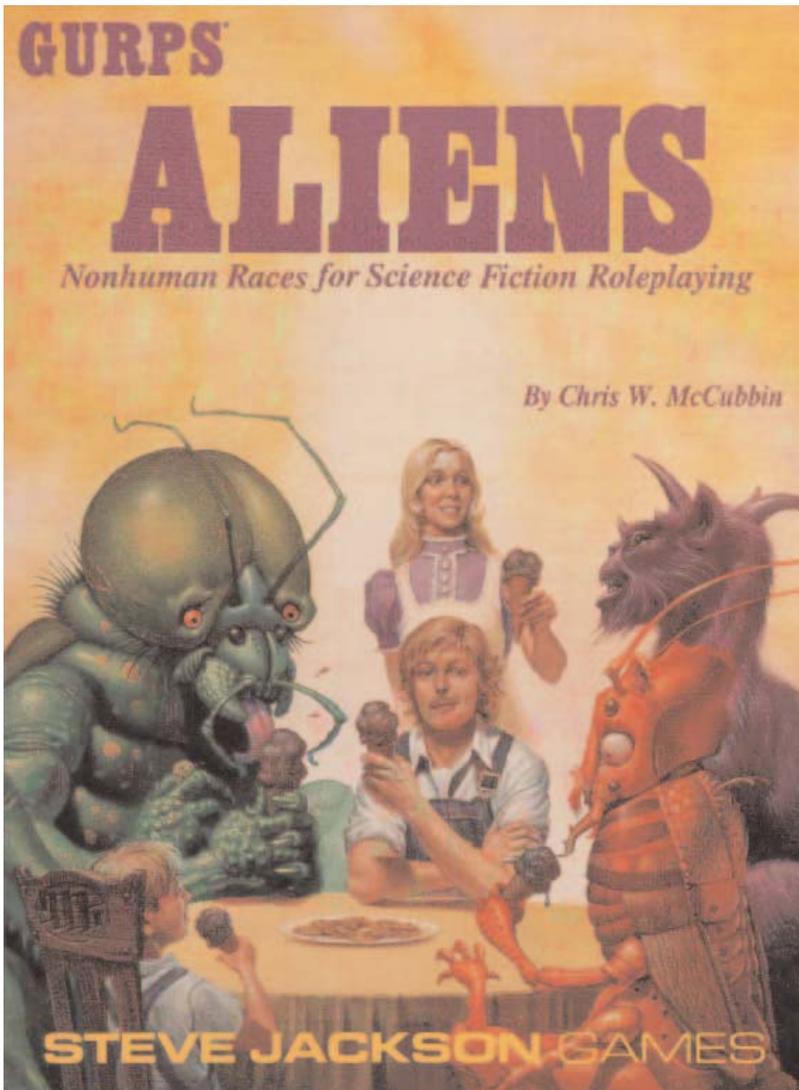


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# ALIENS

*Nonhuman Races for Science Fiction Roleplaying*

*By Chris W. McCubbin*



**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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In fact, every time we open the airlock, we meet a new race . . .

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Many of these races are suitable for use as player characters or allies . . . some are implacable foes . . . and a few are truly *alien*. Among the creatures you'll meet:

- The tentacled Purulu, galactic meddlers and misers. These radioactive octopi can buy anything they want . . . except a world of their own.
- The Memer and Saret, tramp steamers of the spaceways. These symbiotic partners rarely eat and don't need air or warmth; their slow, leaky ships are vital to galactic commerce.
- The obsessively curious Irari, long-lived winged bipeds who hire other races to do the boring task of ruling them.
- The callous Verms (short for "vermin") — a hungry hive of mind-controlling crabs, who can devour a human community from within.



## Race descriptions include:

- Physical appearance — and special physical abilities and limitations, along with the race's preferred environment.
- Psychology — These aren't just people in bug suits! Some aliens have psychologies that are . . . *different*. What do they want? What do they love — or fear? How do they think and behave? (Then again, some of the strangest-looking races can be very human . . .)
- Racial ecology — what do they eat? How did they evolve?
- Culture, religion and politics — how do they behave at home? What (if anything) do they worship? How do they deal with humans and other citizens of the galactic civilization?

## Create new races!

Also included are rules for designing *new* alien races, including racial advantages, disadvantages and skills. Invent balanced alien designs that will intrigue and challenge your players!

Written by Chris McCubbin  
Edited by Steve Jackson  
Additional material by Creede and Sharleen  
Lambard, Steve Jackson, Loyd  
Blankenship and W.G. Armintrout  
Cover by Michael Whelan  
Illustrated by Denis Loubet and Glen Johnson

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**



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By Chris W. McCubbin

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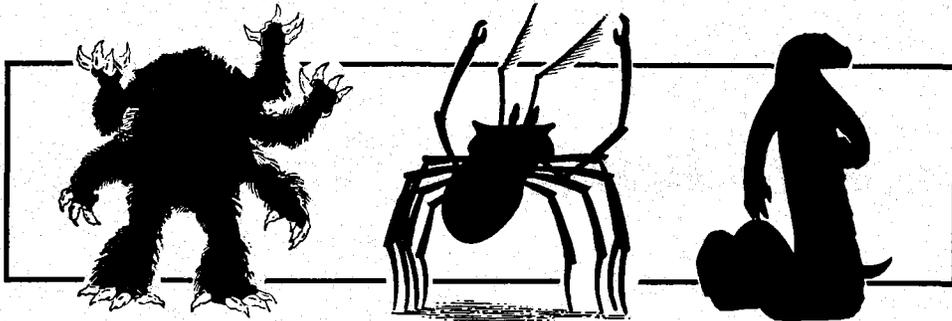
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Playtesters: Frank Anderson, Jr., Loyd Blankenship, Paul Chafe, Walter Milliken, and the Illuminated BBS.

*Nothing in GURPS Aliens is drawn from the 20th Century-Fox films Alien or Aliens — our title is a generic one.*

*Our thanks go to Leading Edge Games, publishers of the licensed Aliens games, for taking the position  
that there is no conflict of names between the two products!*

*For those looking for another truly frightening NPC race, we're happy to recommend Leading Edge's RPG treatment of Aliens.*



As this is the first of a hopefully long string of projects as SJG's on-staff writer, some thanks are in order: To Sharon Kingsford, for tipping me off, and to Kim Thompson, for letting me go gracefully. A special thanks to my wife, Lynette, for being brave and strong and keeping me the same way. A final special thanks to Loyd Blankenship, first for giving me my chance, but mostly for laying an invaluable groundwork for this book's Racial Generation rules in *GURPS Supers*.

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# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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# INTRODUCTION

Science fiction is the literature of discovery. And man, perhaps more than anything else, wants to discover others like himself. Imaginative fiction has always included the idea of *others* out there somewhere, either watching man or waiting for him to come to them. The civilization from another world has been a part of the science fiction repertoire since the time of Verne and Wells. It is an ongoing theme of the genre second only to space travel itself.

H.G. Wells' Martians in *War of the Worlds* set a convention: aliens were ravaging, inhuman conquerors. During the Golden Age of science fiction, writers like Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein and E.E. "Doc" Smith expanded the aliens' characters; perhaps they would be Man's friends, or his teachers. Perhaps they would be — as Ray Bradbury poignantly demonstrated in *The Martian Chronicles* — Man's victims. Perhaps, finally, aliens will be truly alien, with nothing at all to give or take from humanity.



the stars . . . races enough like us to be valuable allies or dangerous enemies. Most of these are suitable for use as PCs in a normal *GURPS Space* campaign. The rest are a mix of the implacably hostile, the superhumanly powerful, and the simply enigmatic.

## Credit and Thanks

Many of the alien races that appear here were originally created by Creede and Sharleen Lambard and by Steve Jackson. The Markann were created by W.G. Armintrout. The Crystal Computers were created by William A. Barton.

Inspiration for the races I created for this book came from the aforementioned Wells, Smith, Asimov, Heinlein and Bradbury, plus a host of other talented dreamers encountered over almost a quarter century of science fiction reading. A few more worthy of special note: John W. Campbell, Arthur C. Clarke, Larry Niven, H. Beam Piper, Gene Roddenberry, George Lucas, and Paul Levitz.

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

**Roleplayer.** This bimonthly newsletter includes new rules, variants, new races, beasts, news on upcoming releases, scenario ideas and more. Ask your game retailer, or write SJ Games for subscription information.

**New supplements and adventures.** We're always working on new material, and we'll be happy to let you know what's available. A current catalog is available for an SASE.

**Errata.** Everyone makes mistakes, including us — but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request.

**Q&A.** We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

**Gamer input.** We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

**BBS.** For those of you who have computers, SJ Games operates a BBS with discussion areas for several games, including *GURPS*. Much of the playtest feedback for new products comes from the BBS. It's up 24 hours a day at 512-447-4449, at 300, 1200 or 2400 baud. Give us a call!

## Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*, Third Edition.

## About the Author

Chris McCubbin is a non-graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in English. He spent six months as assistant editor of Fantagraphics Books' *The Comics Journal*, and a year and a half as managing editor of Fantagraphics' *Amazing Heroes*, where he still occasionally reviews comics. He is now a staff writer for Steve Jackson Games, making him one of the lucky so-and-sos who get to do this for a living.

Chris and his wife, Lynette Alcorn-McCubbin, live in Austin, Texas.

# 1

# THE ALIEN CAMPAIGN

## *The War*

Of all the alien themes in science fiction, perhaps the single most prevalent is The War, where mankind is involved in an all-out fracas with slimies from the next planet/system/galaxy. Outstanding examples of The War include Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and the *Aliens* films. The central conflict of *Star Trek*, essentially, is the Federation's two-front, ongoing police action against the Klingons and the Romulans.

The classic form for this scenario sees the noble, peace-loving, virtuous Terrans suffer an unprovoked attack from slimy, man-eating, implacable vermin from another planet. The chitinous fiends soon discover they've sliced off more protein than they can process when Our Heroes rise up in righteous rage to defend their homes and families. Often there are several races involved as allies of both sides.

There's no reason why a cynical GM couldn't reverse this whole schtick. The peaceful moss farmers of Planet Beta wake up one day to discover that rapacious real estate developers from Terra have landed and are busily turning their beloved slime swamps into condos. The Betans, naturally, decide direct action is called for.

Since the Vietnam era, the usual war-story formula has changed. In contemporary science fiction, the reasons for The War are usually political and arcane. Neither side particularly hates the other, they're just ordinary folks (human and not), who are interested in 1) staying alive, and 2) staying out of trouble with their superiors, in that order.



*The Alien Campaign*

One of the *Space GM's* most important decisions, as he creates his campaign universe, is if, when and how many alien races will be included. There can be no random table to generate non-human cultures; the GM must carefully evaluate the needs of his campaign, and select or design extraterrestrials that fit his universe.

## **Aliens vs. Monsters**

The GM must keep in mind the difference between alien races and space monsters. A space monster is a plot convenience . . . it could be vicious or friendly, smart or stupid, single or a horde . . . but it exists primarily as an obstacle the PCs must get through to complete their mission. Once they encounter the space monster and kill it, ask it the right question, or take the item they need, the monster's usefulness in the session is over, and it generally ceases to exist.

An alien race, on the other hand, should be an ongoing part of the campaign. Aliens are not monsters, they're characters. It's important for the GM to know, in detail, the cultures, tendencies and abilities of his non-human races. It's also important to remember that each alien in the campaign is an individual — a person — with its own motivations and goals (even a true hive mentality is an individual personality which happens to inhabit many bodies).

## **Campaign Style**

Once the GM decides to include extraterrestrial races in his campaign, the question that follows immediately is "how many?" If man is not alone, how many neighbors does he have, and what does he know about them? The answer to this question will determine the whole direction of the campaign.

### *First Contact*

The theme of countless science fiction stories, this is the ideal jumping-off point for an alien campaign. Do we find them? Perhaps the PCs are an exploratory team or colonist party, unconcerned with anything but the new planet's mineral content and the nearest trade route, when suddenly they're confronted with evidence of . . . others.

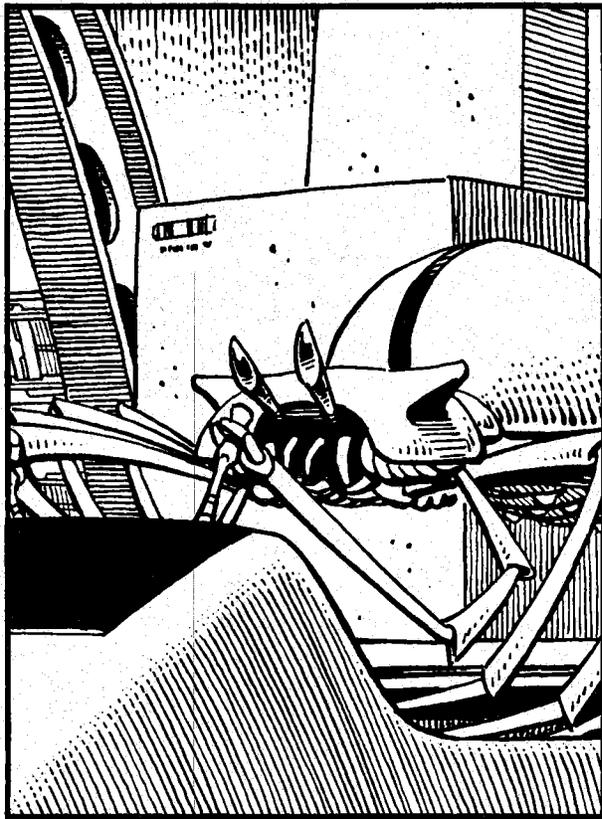
Perhaps *they find us*, and the characters are selected to find out who's in the huge glowing object parked over Omaha. Where are the visitors from and what do they want — our friendship? Our mineral wealth? Our brains? Our women? Will our first encounter involve imperialists looking for a new world to conquer, xenophobic nihilists looking for a new world to fry, or superhuman philanthropists delivering the secrets of the universe?

And just because they happened to get here first, they're not necessarily the official envoys of an outer-space civilization. They could be distressed travelers, or fugitives from interstellar tyranny . . . or interstellar justice. Maybe they're space con-beings, looking to make a killing selling cosmic snake oil to the terrestrial rubes.

### Rare Extraterrestrials

Man has encountered other civilizations in the universe, but first contacts are rare. Perhaps we have only met one or two or three other races in years or centuries of exploration. This is ideal for the GM who likes a tight, orderly campaign, or for those who want to probe the cultural and psychological similarities and differences between humanity and the others.

If only a few alien races are in the campaign, they must be selected with special care. Perhaps humanity has found one deadly enemy. Maybe he's also found one steadfast friend to stand with him. Perhaps the two or three interstellar civilizations have formed an alliance to seek for others like themselves. On the other hand, the aliens could be so *very* alien that cooperation or even communication seems an impossible challenge — and exciting roleplaying thrives on impossible challenges.



They're Everywhere!

### They're Everywhere!

The universe is fecund, and humanity can barely set foot on some barren, drifting space rock without meeting some new intelligent life form. The novels of E.E. "Doc" Smith are outstanding examples of how to make a plethora of alien races work in a fictional universe. The various incarnations of *Star Trek* also include a host of "new life and new civilizations."

This background is suited to "thrill a minute" GMs who like to keep new surprises coming fast and furious. A cinematic "space opera" campaign cries out for dozens of non-human civilizations.

### Humans? What Humans?

Finally, GMs looking for a really different roleplaying challenge can decree that the character party is made up entirely of members of one or many nonhuman races. This can make a neat variation on the "First Contact" scenario, as the PCs stumble on mankind for the first time somewhere in the interstellar sticks, or are sent to Earth to invite mankind to join the galactic civilization — an invitation humanity might not take in the spirit it was intended.

Finally, who says humans are necessary for good roleplaying? An even more daring GM might set his campaign so long ago that Earthmen are still in the trees, or in a galaxy so far, far away that humanity will never find it. The GM defines one or several PC races, and the party boards the good ship *Gloork* and blasts off as agents of the Interspecies Confederation of Braapdool. This last alternative is particularly attractive to GMs who may be interested in running a scenario or campaign with very high point-value characters.

### GURPS Crossovers

There's no reason to confine extraterrestrials to the *GURPS Space* campaign. The races and race creation rules in this supplement can be used with many other *GURPS* worldbooks.

The most obvious use for this supplement, next to the *Space* campaign, is in *GURPS Supers*, where the meta-heroes are constantly fighting off alien invasions — when the heroes aren't "strange visitors from another planet" themselves.

Another use for extraterrestrials is with *GURPS Special Ops*. "The Martians are invading! Send in the Marines!" Even more unfortunate, perhaps, are the would-be alien conquerors who have the misfortune to invade the near-future America of *GURPS Autoduel*, where everyone on the roads is and armed for bear.

*GURPS Horror* and space creatures go surprisingly well together. Most of the great monsters of H.P. Lovecraft were actually very powerful, very unhuman space races. We also have the example of such classic horror films as *The Thing*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *Alien*. Old-fashioned, lustful Bug-Eyed Monsters were a staple of the pulp magazines and movie serials that inspired *GURPS Cliffhangers*.

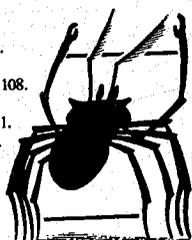
Space aliens can really spice up a historical campaign like that offered by *GURPS Cliffhangers* and *GURPS Swashbucklers* (for an excellent use of aliens in an Old West setting, see the graphic novel *The Secret of San Saba* by Jack Jackson, published by Kitchen Sink Press).

And of course the primitives of *GURPS Ice Age* can expect at any time to encounter big, black, singing rocks from space. Alternately, the PCs could be the space gods, sent to sow the seeds of sentience across primitive Earth.

Finally, mention should be made of the several licensed *GURPS* worldbooks based on science fiction and science fantasy, including (so far) *GURPS Humanx*, *GURPS Riverworld*, *GURPS Witch World*, *GURPS Horseclans* and *GURPS Wild Cards*.

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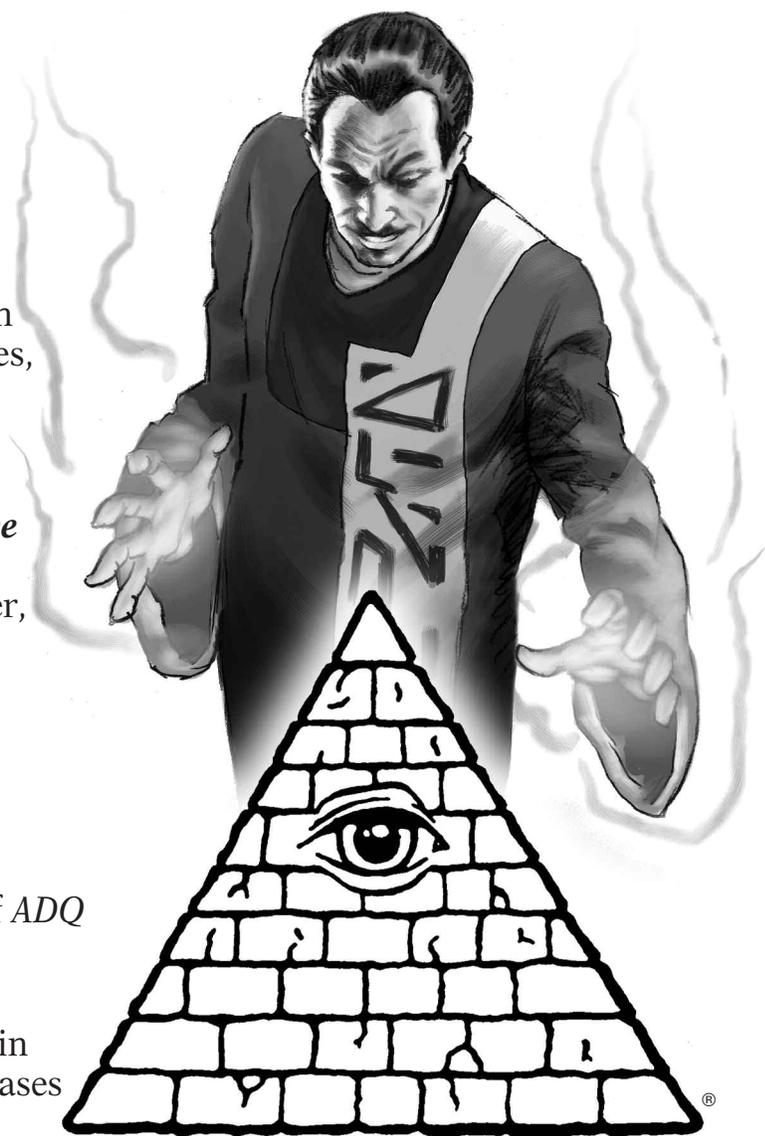
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