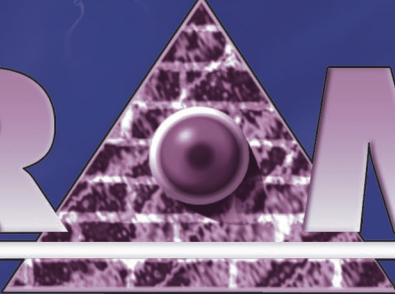


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/110 December '17

DEEP SPACE



BAZAAR

Nathan M.M. Meluvor

SPACE WRECKS

David L. Pulver

SPACE PIRATES

Adrian Tymes

AETHYRIC SPACE

Christopher R. Rice & J. Edward Tremlett

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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IN THIS ISSUE

Fire up the thrusters and get ready for adventure . . . that-a-way! This issue of *Pyramid* is devoted to deep-space exploration, with an emphasis on excitement and adventure.

Some space settings are magical . . . and that's literally true in *Aethyric Space*! Join Christopher R. Rice and J. Edward Tremlett as they take you on a tour of a complete space-opera campaign setting, where Ritual Path magic empowers strange spacefaring vessels. Discover the history, rules, setting, and gear of those who aspire to use aethyr.

Shopping isn't something that's just a safe activity between adventures; sometimes it can be downright *Bazaar*. This crossroads tethers together the impossible to make your shopping dreams a reality. If it's available to purchase, you can probably find it in this systemless location!

If you're looking for loot in all the wrong places, you can do worse than exploring *Space Wrecks*. *GURPS Spaceships* author David L. Pulver takes you on a tour of four different space wrecks, complete with appropriate *Spaceships* stats for what heroes might unearth. For each vessel, you'll discover the history, the disaster, and the possible rewards intrepid investigators might cart off.

If you find yourself in a bad sector of the galaxy, watch out for *Space Pirates*. Learn about various types of ne'er-do-wells that heroes might run up against (or even ally with!), complete with a sample setting that includes *GURPS* character-building guidelines and *Spaceships* vessels that such inexorable entrepreneurs might use.

Not everyone is just some random mook in a rubber mask; often the inhabitants of those far-flung worlds have *An Alien Way of Thinking*. These new *GURPS* traits will let you represent strange ways that an extraterrestrial race might interact with the world.

In this month's Random Thought Table, we'll look at pressing your luck and how it's an especially appropriate element to introduce to interstellar investigators. With this issue of *Pyramid*, you'll get new places to see, new faces to be, and lots of stuff to buy or sell for the right fee. The stars are your destination, and this issue's your ticket!

ARTICLE COLORS

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: *GURPS* Features

Purple: Systemless Features

COVER ART

Alan Gutierrez

Anyone who sits on top of the largest hydrogen-oxygen fueled system in the world, knowing they're going to light the bottom, and doesn't get a little worried, does not fully understand the situation.

– John Young

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FROM THE EDITOR

SET COURSE FOR THE MYSTERIOUS VOID

One of the things I loved about the old *Star Trek* television series (and, to a slightly lesser extent, subsequent shows) is that it really allowed for the notion that “space” exploration could mean darn-near *anything*. A planet-eating corn Bugle? A giant Abraham Lincoln? Space hippies? Time travel to the 1930s? The literal edge of space? All of these were possible . . . and more.

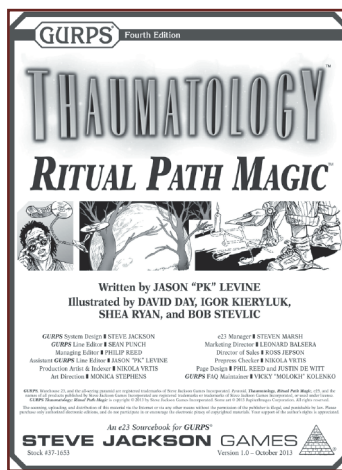
There’s definitely room for campaigns where space feels familiar and well-trodden. Not every game needs to be a nonstop litany of mind-blowing revelations. In a lot of ways, science fiction works best when there’s a baseline level of wonderment that’s treated as normal. Faster-than-light travel? Replicators conjuring perfect food and drink? Robots able to carry on fully human conversation. Yeah, it’s all nice. (Look at how mundane you likely treat your own Internet access, and compare it to someone from 1977: “You can conjure practically any song, book, movie, or television show from the ether on a device you put in your pocket?! Along with any fact or item of trivia? *And* you can use it to avoid telephone calls?!”

But I’ve also wandered through my own town – a relatively small city, in the grand scheme of things – in the wee hours of the morn, and found myself surprised by elements that are just off the beaten path, or things that I thought were true that I now need to recast in a different light. And if a town of 100,000 people can hold surprises, why should I imagine the vast expanse of the universe can be any *less* surprising? (It also helps that I have the direction sense of a blindfolded Roomba, so the odds of my wandering into something new and interesting are greatly increased over what’s experienced by competent navigators.)

This issue, then, is an ode to ways the untapped parts of the galaxy can still surprise us . . . in both totally new ways and in aspects that feel both familiar yet perfectly suited for the infinite canvas of a universe of possibilities. It’s a great big universe; enjoy the ride!

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So how was this voyage to new and uncharted realms? Did you find something here you’ll bring along in the cargo bay? Or should something remain hidden among the stars? Let us know your thoughts privately via email at pyramid@sjgames.com, or by joining the public discussion at forums.sjgames.com.



Additional Material: Jason “PK” Levine

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- Hopping dimensions or traveling in time is currently understood to be impossible.

- There is no transformative magic for living, sapient beings *other* than bodyforms (see below) – the process drives the subject *mad*. Plants and beings with an IQ of 5 or less are affected (usually); magically altered “battle-beasts” are popular assault weapons with all races.

- Communication spells (either via Path of Energy or Path of Body) automatically use long-distance modifiers (p. B241) instead of the standard range penalties (p. B550). Additionally, adding a flat +10 energy and a Lesser Strengthen Magic effect allows the caster to *ignore* range penalties completely.

Magical Skills

The following skills are considered “magical”: Alchemy, Astronomy, Autohypnosis, Dreaming, Esoteric Medicine, Exorcism, Expert Skill (any supernatural), Fortune-Telling, Hazardous Materials (any esoteric), Herb Lore, Hidden Lore (any supernatural), Innate Attack, Meditation, Mental Strength, Occultism, Physics (Metaphysics), Ritual Magic, Symbol Drawing, Thaumatology, and all Path skills.

Using Starstuff

Starstuff uses the rules for raw magic from *GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 227, with the following modifications. Raw magic reduces the number of Greater effects of a ritual by one *or* gives 20 points of mana for a spell; otherwise, it’s used as per *Thaumatology*. “Flavored” raw magic can be broken into concepts (e.g., death, weather) or Paths (e.g., Path of Energy). Work Raw Magic becomes a ritual whose parameters are Lesser Sense Magic + Lesser Control Magic, costing 7 energy.

The Raw Magic Store advantage (*Thaumatology*, p. 228) becomes 25 points/level. This is cheaper than Energy Reserve because once raw magic is spent, it cannot be easily refilled – new sources of it must be *found*.

Using more than (HT + Magery / 10) points of raw magic (starstuff) in a 24-hour period requires a Will roll. Add a penalty to this roll equal to (number of points used past threshold - 1) × -2. Failure means the mage is addicted to its use and cannot use his own mana reserve at all until he kicks the habit. Critical failure results in the same, but the caster loses a point of HT as well.

Aethyr Benefits

Aethyr-rings, aethyr-lines, and nodes give an energy reduction to spells: *rings* give 5% to 10% (1d-4 × 5%), *lines* give 5% to 15% (1d-3 × 5%), and *nodes* give 5% to 20% (1d-2 × 5%). When rolling randomly, the minimum discount is 5%. This stacks with other energy reductions, like traditional trappings.

Spells with the range modifier also get a boost. Being on a *ring* allows for communication spells to be used with no range penalty. *Lines* allow spells to use the long-distance modifiers (p. B241) to calculate range costs for non-combat spells. *Nodes* also permit using long-distance modifiers with combat spells!

Mana reserves and Energy Reserve (Magic) automatically refill on lines at a rate of one point per 10 minutes on a line, per five minutes on a ring, or per minute on a node.

Tales whispered in all empires speak of “super-nodes” that reduce spell costs by 15% to 30% (10% + [1d × 5%]) and restore mana at a rate of one point per *second*.

BODYFORMS

Bodyforms need a special spell to be individualized to the caster. This requires *two* Lesser Transform Body effects, a bodyform “package” to be purchased as Altered Traits, with duration (an hour is typical) and subject weight modifiers. The ritual is *always* a charm. Furthermore, Bodyform spells have a special drawback and a special benefit.

- Activating the charm takes at least 10 minutes of meditating and focusing one’s mind on the change. This can still be done instantly, but requires a Will or Will-based Path of Body roll at -1 per minute shaved off (-10 allows this to be done instantly like any other charm). FP may be spent on a 1:1 basis to negate the penalty to the initial roll. When the focusing is done, make a note of the margin of success of the roll, subtract it from 10, and then treat that as a *percentage* of lost capabilities. For example, if you only succeeded by 5 and your bodyform gave you +6 to ST, you’d get +3 to ST instead.

- Bodyform charms can be used *anywhere* – even in a null-zone (apply the usual penalties there just like you would for an adept; see *Ritual Adept*, p. 8).

The following example is common among all empires.

Starchild Bodyform

Spell Effects: Lesser Control Magic + Lesser Transform Body ×2.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Starchild meta-trait.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell is cast as a charm and gives the subject -2 to ST, +1 to DX, Doesn’t Breathe (Oxygen Storage, ×50), No Degeneration in Zero-G, Radiation Tolerance 2, Sealed, Temperature Tolerance 50, and Vacuum Support for the next hour. It uses the rules for bodyforms (above).

Typical Casting: Lesser Transform Body (8) + Greater Transform Body (8) + Lesser Control Magic (5) + Altered Traits, Starchild meta-trait (88) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *115 energy (115×1).*

I felt something . . . it awakened, but now I need to know how to wield it.

– *Rey, Star Wars: The Last Jedi*

Who Owns the Wreck

The ongoing legal dispute over ownership offers plenty of opportunity for intrigue . . . as well as parties who would rather see Blaze and his wife stay lost.

Bird of Paradise-Class Fast Yacht (TL11[^])

This is a small space yacht designed for speed, comfort, and ease of operation. It has a SM +7 streamlined hull that masses 300 tons and is 45 yards long. It only carries two to four people, but they are provided with numerous amenities, including an office, bar, sauna, large swimming pool, and automated sickbay. The hangar bay is usually outfitted with one or two luxury vehicles (typically a limo, air car, or sports car).

Front Hull System

[1]	Advanced Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 7).
[2]	Control Room (C8 computer, comm/sensor 7, three control stations).
[3]	Habitat (luxury cabin).
[4]	Habitat (luxury cabin).
[5]	Habitat (office; five tons steerage cargo).
[6]	Hangar Bay (10 tons).
[core]	Habitat (two-bed sickbay with automeds).

Central Hull System

[1]	Advanced Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 7).
[2]	Habitat (gym establishment).
[3]	Habitat (bar establishment).
[4]	Fuel Tank (filled with water; used as swimming pool).
[5]	Habitat (sauna establishment; opens onto fuel tank).
[6]	Tertiary Battery (one turret with 3-MJ improved ultraviolet laser; 14.5 tons cargo).

Rear Hull System

[1]	Advanced Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 7).
[2]	Engine Room (one workspace).
[3!]	Stardrive.
[4!]	Stardrive.
[5!]	Hot Reactionless Engine (2G).
[6!]	Hot Reactionless Engine (2G).
[core]	Fusion Reactor (two Power Points)

The ship has gravitic compensators and artificial gravity. Normal crew are a pilot and optional co-pilot/engineer, although robots are often employed.

Currently, *Blue Rhapsody* is lightly damaged. The ship is down to dHP 44 and the fusion reactor is disabled. Lack of maintenance has reduced her to HT 10.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
11 [^]	<i>Bird of Paradise</i>	50	-1/5	13	4G/c	300	29.9	+7	4ASV	7	2x	\$15.68M

Top air speed is 5,000 mph.

WRECK OF THE HEXANNA

This adventure seed is for a group who own their own starship and are willing to take on odd jobs.

Bavaria Ingold was the brutal planetary dictator of Kabta IV, where his Reflectionist movement was responsible for the murder and forced cyborgization of 1.7 million political dissidents. Eventually a popular uprising overthrew Ingold.

Survivors of the Kabta IV death factories have attempted to track down ex-Reflectionists to bring them to justice, a process that has taken decades as many of them have hidden under false identities or body changes.

Abraxus Fiddle received a tip about one of the most notorious escaped Reflectionists, Anabel Greaves, who was a senior member of the regime's Black Mirror secret police unit. According to the report, she was living under an assumed alternate identity, possibly as a merchant sailor named Penny North, who was the cook aboard a small freighter called the *Hexanna*. As deputy commander of the prison-hospital complex known as "the Oven," Greaves was personally responsible for the forced brainstripping of 133,567 people. She must face justice!

Unfortunately, tracking down the *Hexanna* is complicated. During the last space war, it was posted as missing while carrying a military cargo, one of countless ships that were lost to space mines, commerce raiders, or privateers. Maybe it was blown up with Greaves/North aboard. However, Fiddle has

The Reflectionists must face justice!

sorted through years of war-era records. One of these suggests a ship matching *Hexanna's* profile was part of a convoy that was swarmed by raiders in the Remillia system, an obscure backwater place near the frontier.

Ship-log reports from the *Swiftsure*, one of the few vessels to escape the raiders, indicated the *Hexanna* had been hit early in the battle. It had attempted to evade by diving into the thick atmosphere of Remillia VI, but had been pursued by enemy fighters and shot down. Whether it was destroyed or had simply crashed remains unknown. According to survey data, Remillia VI is a hostile world with a dense corrosive atmosphere and high gravity.

Abraxus Fiddle wants to hire the party to travel to Remillia VI. Their mission is to use their ship's radar to search for wreckage of the *Hexanna*. If they find any, they are to land and determine whether the ship had any survivors. If they find human remains, they are to secure DNA samples so that their identities can be determined, and make sure that Penny North did indeed perish. Fiddle will pay reasonable expenses plus \$100,000, with another \$50,000 if DNA sampling or other evidence can identify or clear Penny North. (GM can adjust the amounts as appropriate.)

Wildcard Skills

More importantly, PCs and NPCs alike have been raised in an environment where all of this happens routinely; it is no more wondrous to them than citrus preventing scurvy is to us. In many settings, educational technology has advanced alongside other fields: Han Solo, hardly a scholar among his peers, had engineering and astrographic knowledge that would have granted him numerous honorary doctorates on modern Earth. Wildcard skills (p. B175) can represent the fruit of such education, with these caveats:

- The GM should set a list of acceptable wildcard skills, using the examples on p. B175 or in *GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills* to make sure no wildcard skills are not too broad. (“Everything My PC Will Ever Want To Do!” is not a valid wildcard skill.) The GM should limit the number of points that can be spent on any one skill.

- For wildcard skills that cover both physical and mental activities, record the DX-based and IQ-based levels separated by a slash. For instance, if a character has Space Pirate!-13/11,

plotting a course with Navigation would roll against a skill level of 11, while shooting with Guns would see a skill level of 13.

- Where the skills require a tech level, use the campaign’s default tech level.

- Wildcard skills should not automatically remove familiarity penalties. In the example setting (below), someone who used Pilot! (*Power-Ups 7*, p. 34) to pilot an *Angler* would be at -2 to skill when piloting a *Super 49er* while getting familiar with its controls.

- If some have access to these skills and others do not, access is a 10-point Unusual Background (Wildcard Training).

- Characters can use a wildcard skill as a base, then add points into a skill under the wildcard. For instance, someone with Science! (*Power-Ups 7*, p. 35) at IQ level could add 4 more points to Physics to gain that skill at IQ+1. It is inefficient to do this for more than two skills within the same wildcard skill; the GM should allow players who want to improve a third skill to reallocate the points in individual skills into higher levels of the wildcard skill, to reflect greater ability through diverse training.

EXAMPLE SETTING: THE EXPANSE

Having discovered how to manufacture wormholes, humankind has spread throughout the stars. Earth stands as a tombstone, plagued and poison to its children, thwarting all efforts to reclaim it. There is peace for now, with humanity governed by the Venusian Pact, an alliance of colonies formed to support colonization and the population of far stars to forever prevent a repeat of humankind’s near-extinction. The Pact is opposed internally by the House of People, a faction that promotes development of existing colonies. Dancing around this divide are the space pirates, who combine development and expansion by doing without traditional colonies. And everywhere, individual heroes are determining humanity’s future.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Accurate records are sparse, but historians agree, humankind kicked itself off Earth. Biological warfare resulted in the Plague: a multi-vector weapon designed to mutate, spread, and kill. Even today, strains of it war for dominance among simpler life forms; all mammalian life on the planet has gone extinct. Over 100 million people were evacuated to lunar colonies, most in cryostasis for want of life support.

Humanity struggled, but survived. Venus was terraformed in mere decades, by adapting the Plague’s trick of using several methods in concert to overwhelm the problem. There was now enough living space. Soon, Mars was made habitable, too. Then someone chanced across the trick to making wormholes.

By now ideologically locked into spreading humanity to save it, the government pressed forward with colonization missions. However, this required people – and there were not enough to support an advanced technology base as it was. Natural population growth was not nearly fast enough, so mass human cloning was authorized. While that first

generation was growing up and automated child-rearing was being worked out, “parent” was a full-time job for a greater fraction of the human race than ever before. Cloned babies soon outnumbered natural-born, a trend which is slowing but still exists today.

For better or for worse, mass cloning provided a test bed for genetic augmentation. New subspecies were formed, always with the best of intent, though for varying definitions of “best.” Racial discrimination arose. While it has faded over time, it still sends people to the stars; the space pirates’ meritocracy favors what one does over who one is, so a catgirl has the same shot at a captain’s seat as anyone.

The space pirates organized about three decades after interstellar colonization began. When an increasing number of people made their homes outside of gravity wells, the planet-focused government – along with a coalition of businesses concerned about the economic impact of asteroid mining – launched a media campaign to make the public distrust space-based businesses. One captain summed up their response thusly: “If we’re pirates, then get me a parrot and hoist the Jolly Roger. Arr, me and my hearties are off to plunder some buried treasure!” Rallying around this cultural banner, the “space pirates” may be the most extensive case of turning an insult into a badge of honor in human history.

It has been over a century since the evacuation. Few now live who remember humankind on Earth. Everywhere there is building and colonization and discovery. Trade is loosely regulated; some planets have turned to sponsoring privateers to boost their revenues, and the Pact Navy never has enough spare ships to hunt them down. On many low-population colonies, a single spaceship can bully the planet – or save it from a tyrant. Even in more populated systems, individual acts of heroism can inspire billions.

ABOUT GURPS

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