

Jan 28, 2000

WELCOME

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 **Brubek'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 -- to artistic license, in other words. 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 space ship 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.

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Editor, JTAS

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