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Looking Back

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?

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* 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.