

THIS IS FREE TRADER BEOWULF

AUTHOR

Shannon Appelcline

EDITOR

Matthew Sprange

PROOFREADING

Charlotte Law

GRAPHIC DESIGN

ART DIRECTION

Sandrine Thirache

ILLUSTRATIONS

Quentin Soubrouillard

SPECIAL THANKS

Marc Miller

A SYSTEM HISTORY OF TRAVELLER®

**Designers
& Dragons**

Text copyright © 2022-2024 Designers & Dragons LLC
Graphic Design copyright © 2024 Mongoose Publishing
TRAVELLER is a registered trademark of Mongoose Publishing Ltd.





Sample file

DEDICATION

Collaboration is the heart of roleplaying, and the most collaborative settings are the better for it.

This book is thus dedicated to the diverse hands that created and expanded the Traveller game and the Charted Space universe, and especially to those who are no longer with us.

To the heroes who went before to show the way.
To the ones who challenged the darkness.
To the proud fallen, our dear lost brothers and sisters.
To absent friends.
—Martin Dougherty, *Early Fallen* (2005)

In memory of Bob Bledsaw, Douglas E. Berry, Andrew Boulton, Clayton Bush, Paul Montgomery Crabaugh, Jesse De Graff, John M. Ford, Keith Frye, Bryan Gibson, Hunter Gordon, Jennell Jaquays, J. Andrew Keith, Donovan Lambertus, Gregory P. Lee, John Lees, Kerry Lloyd, Steve Maggi, Terry McInnes, Don McKinney, Nancy Parker, Robert Parker, Herb Petro, Hans Rancke-Madsen, Don Rapp, Blair Reynolds, Dave Sering, Bari Z. Stafford Sr., Jim Ward, Loren Wiseman, and Traveller's other collaborators who have passed beyond the rimward marches. And, of course, in memory of Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax, who gave us roleplaying in the first place.



CONTENTS

I. GDW: BEFORE THE GAME

1973–1977

1	A Spoonful of Inspirations	09
2	From Gamers to Designers	10
3	Building a Publishing Empire	11
	<i>A View from the Industry: Science-Fiction Strategy</i>	13
4	A Tale of Two Imperiums	14
5	The Roleplaying Onslaught	16
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 1975</i>	18
6	Checklist: GDW's Generic SF Board Games	19

II. GDW: THE LITTLE BLACK BOOKS

1976–1979

1	Three Books for the SF Fans, Up in the Sky	23
	<i>A View from the Industry: Early Science-Fiction Roleplaying</i>	25
2	A Dollop of Innovation	27
3	Traveller's Special Relationship	29
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 1977</i>	30
4	The Early Supplements	32
	<i>What Could Have Been: GDW Roleplaying Games</i>	34
5	Checklist: GDW's Other RPGs	37

III. GDW: DISCOVERING THE IMPERIUM

1979–1985

1	Setting the Scene	41
2	Keeping a Journal	41
	<i>A View from the Industry: The First Settings</i>	45
3	O Brothers, Where Art Thou?	47
4	Jump Points to Adventures	48
	<i>Map: Spinward Marches Classic Adventures</i>	50
	<i>Map: Solomani Rim Classic Adventures</i>	51
5	Closing the Little Black Books	52
6	Checklist: GDW's Little Black Book Line	56
7	Checklist: GDW's Traveller Board Games	57

IV. LICENSEES: THE GUILD TO THE LORDS

1979–1985

1	The Guild & The Group	61
	<i>A View from the Industry: The First Licensed RPG Supplements</i>	63
2	The Other Workshop	64
	<i>Map: Golden Age Land Grants</i>	65
3	The Baron & The Stars	66
4	The Paranoia Pair	67
5	The Chicago Nexus	68
	<i>What Could Have Been: FASA Licensed Supplements</i>	71
	<i>Map: Far Frontiers Classic Adventures</i>	72
	<i>Map: Reaver's Deep Classic Adventures</i>	72

IV. LICENSEES: THE GUILD TO THE LORDS

1979-1985

6	The Maryland Nexus	73
	<i>What Could Have Been: Other Licensed Supplements</i>	75
7	Miniatures and More	76
8	The Software Makers	78
9	After the Licenses	79
10	Checklist: FASA's Supplements	80
11	Checklist: Gamelord's Supplements	81
12	Checklist: Group One's Supplements	81
13	Checklist: Judge's Guild's Supplements	82
14	Checklist: Marischal Adventures Supplements	82
15	Checklist: Paranoia Press Supplements	82
16	Checklist: Other Licensed Supplements	83
17	Checklist: Citadel Miniatures	83
18	Checklist: Grenadier Miniatures	83
19	Checklist: Steve Jackson Games	83
20	Checklist: Martian Metals	84

V. GDW: THE BIG COLOR BOOKS

1982-1987

1	Could It Be ... Satan?	89
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 1981</i>	90
2	One Book to Rule Them (and Some Boxes Too)	91
	<i>What Could Have Been: GDW Classic Traveller</i>	92
3	Aliens Among Us	94
	<i>Map: The Aliens of Charted Space</i>	97
4	On Foreign Shores	98
5	Twilight of the SF God	99
6	Checklist: GDW's Big Colour Books and Boxes	101

VI. DGP AND SEEKER: NEW TRAVELLER PARTNERS

1985-1987

1	Beginning a Grand Tour	105
2	Two Years, Two Travellers	108
	<i>A View from the Industry: Science-Fiction Roleplaying of the '80s</i>	109
	<i>Map: DGP's The Grand Tour</i>	112
3	Completing the Grand Tour	111
4	Desperately Seeking Starships	113
5	Checklist: DGP	116
6	Checklist: DGP's Missing MegaTraveller SKUs	116
7	Checklist: Seeker	116

VII. GDW: THE MEGATRAVELLER ERA

1987-1992

1	Shattering the Imperium	119
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 1987</i>	121
2	The Early Days of the Rebellion	123
	<i>Map: Spinward Marches Rebellion Adventures</i>	125
3	DGP Enters the Fray	127
	<i>What Could Have Been: DGP MegaTraveller</i>	129
4	More Software Makers	130
5	Chuck Gannon Brings the Hard Times	131
	<i>What Could Have Been: The Gannon Plan</i>	132
6	A Changing of the Guard	133
	<i>Map: Diaspora Hard Times Adventures</i>	134
	<i>What Could Have Been: GDW MegaTraveller</i>	136
7	DGP Withdraws from the Battle	137
8	Checklist: GDW's MegaTraveller Books	139
9	Checklist: GDW's Missing MegaTraveller SKUs	139

VIII. HIWG AND 'ZINES: THE GROWING FANDOM

1981-1992

1	Conventional Fandom: 1979-1983	143
2	The First Fanzines: 1981-1983	144
3	Prelude to a HIWG: 1977-1987	145
	<i>A View from the Industry:</i>	
	<i>RPG Fandom of the '70s, '80s, and '90s</i>	147
4	Death of an Emperor, Birth of a Working Group: 1987-1989	148
5	HIWG Conquers the World: 1989-1999	151
6	The Decline of the HIWGan Empire: 1989-1992	152
	<i>Map: HIWG in Print</i>	154
7	Checklist: Major Fanzines	156
8	Checklist: Major Magazines	157

IX. GDW: THE NEW ERA

1993-1996

1	The Path to a New Era: 1991-1993	161
2	A Game Ready to Re-Awaken: 1993	163
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 1993</i>	165
3	Smash & Grab: 1993-1995	166
	<i>Map: Diaspora New Era Adventures</i>	168
4	Across the Universe: 1992-1997	169
5	Marching to a Different Drummer: 1995	172
6	Legends of the Fall: 1991-1996	173
	<i>What Could Have Been: GDW New Era</i>	175
7	Checklist: GDW's New Era Books	178
8	Checklist: GDW's Missing New Era SKUs	178
9	Checklist: RAFM Miniatures – Crewmembers	178
10	Checklist: RAFM Miniatures – Starships	179

X. IMPERIUM: THE T4 ERA

1996-1998

1	Before T4: 1996	183
2	The Whitman Crash: 1996	185
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 1997</i>	188
3	BITS & Pieces: 1995-1999	187
4	Adieu, Milieu: 1997	190
	<i>Map: Sylean Core M0 Adventures</i>	191
5	Fall of the Imperium Empire: 1997-1999	193
	<i>What Could Have Been: T4</i>	195
6	Checklist: Imperium's T4 Books	196
7	Checklist: Imperium's Missing T4 SKUs	197

XI. SHATTERED: THE LONG NIGHT

1998-2007

1	Nightfall: 1996-2003	201
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 2001</i>	203
2	Imperium Eternal: 1997-2016	204
	<i>What Could Have Been: Steve Jackson Games</i>	207
3	Into the Far Future: 1996-2006	208
4	These Go to T20: 1999-2009	210
	<i>Map: Ley Gateway Era Adventures</i>	211
	<i>Map: Glimmerdrift Reaches Gateway Era Adventures</i>	211
	<i>What Could Have Been: QLI</i>	213
5	The Voyages of the Avenger Enterprise: 2005-2008	214
6	Second Comstar to the Right: 2004-2008	216
7	More Metals: 2001-2018	218
	<i>What Could Have Been: Other Publishers</i>	219
8	Points of Light in the Darkness: 1994-2009	219
9	End of an Era: 2007	221
10	Chart: Major Events Surrounding the Long Night	222

XI. SHATTERED: THE LONG NIGHT

1998-2007

11	Checklist: BITS Books	224
12	Checklist: Comstar Games and Avenger Enterprises' T20 Books	225
13	Checklist: Comstar Games and Avenger Enterprises' TNE Books	226
14	Checklist: Comstar Games and Avenger Enterprises' Hero Books	227
15	Far Future's Big Floppy Books	227
16	Checklist: Far Future's Lost Books	228
17	Checklist: QuikLink Interactive's T20 Books	228
18	Checklist: Steve Jackson Games' GURPS <i>Traveller</i> Books	229
19	Checklist: Steve Jackson Games' Missing GURPS <i>Traveller</i> SKUs	230

XII. MONGOOSE: RISE OF THE THIRD IMPERIUM

2008-2015

1	Run and Find Out: 2000-2007	237
2	A New Golden Age: 2007-2011	237
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 2012</i>	241
3	The OGL Diaspora: 2008-2016	242
	<i>A View from the Industry: Science-Fiction Roleplaying of the 21st Century</i>	245
4	The Long Night's Last Star: 2008-2011	246
5	A New Hard Times: 2011-2016	247
	<i>Map: Spinward Marches Mongoose 1e Adventures</i>	248
	<i>What Could Have Been: Mongoose Traveller 1e</i>	250
6	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller 1e</i> Core Books	251
7	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller 1e</i> Core PDFs	253
8	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller 1e</i> Other Settings	254
9	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller 1e</i> WWII PDFs	255
10	Checklist: Comstar Games & Avenger Enterprises' Mongoose 1e Books	256

XIII. FFE: T5 & BEYOND

1997-PRESENT

1	The Far Future Rolls Toward us: 1997-2007	261
2	T5 Arrives: 2008-2013	262
3	T5's Imperium Lines: 2006-Present	264
	<i>What Could Have Been: T5</i>	265
4	In Media Days: 1995-Present	266
5	T5, Point by Point: 2014-2019	270
6	Checklist: Far Future Traveller5 Releases	271
7	Checklist: Far Future Traveller5 Fiction and Non-Fiction	271

XIV. MONGOOSE: STREPHON LIVES

2016-PRESENT

1	Back to the Core: 2015-2018	275
	<i>The Rise of Cepheus: 2016-Present</i>	276
2	Go Trojans!: 2016-Present	278
	<i>Map: The Trojan Reaches in Pirates of Drinax</i>	280
	<i>Map: The Trojan Reach's Other Adventures</i>	280
3	Strephon Lives: 2016-2023	282
	<i>A View from the Industry: Roleplaying in 2022</i>	283
	<i>Map: Mongoose Publishing Charted Space</i>	285
4	Revival Vengeance: 2022-Present	286
	<i>What Could Be: Mongoose Traveller 2e</i>	287
5	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller 2e</i> Core Books	288
6	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller</i> Fiction PDFs	290
7	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller 2e</i> 2300AD Settings	290
8	Checklist: Mongoose <i>Traveller 2e</i> Core PDFs	291

1973–1977

GDW

BEFORE THE GAME

The pre-history of *Traveller* is the story of collecting together the ingredients for what would become the roleplaying industry's most long-lived SFRPG. It's the story of how *Traveller's* publisher GDW was founded and how it gathered inspirations and innovations that Marc Miller would mix together in 1977 to create *Traveller*.



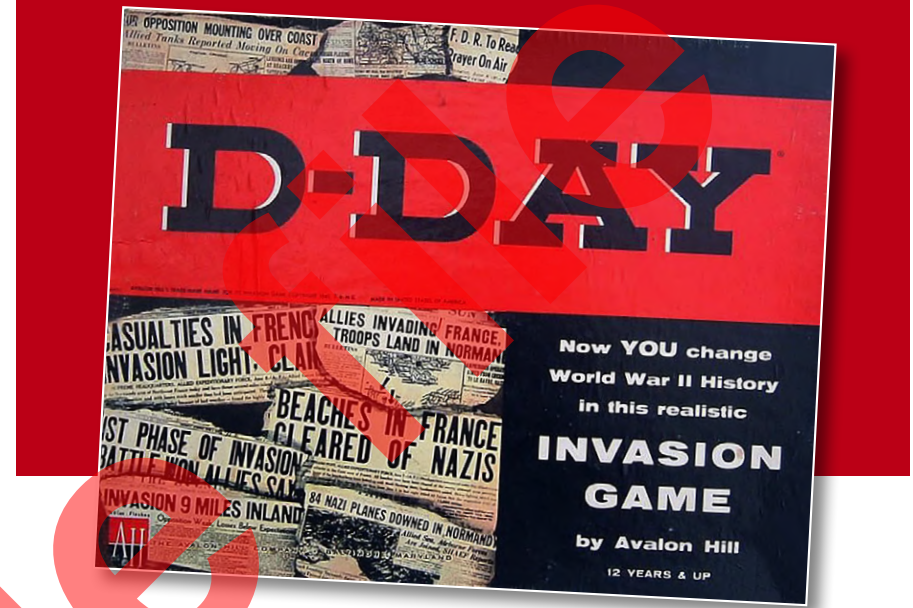
A SPOONFUL OF INSPIRATIONS 1962-1972

What inspires the creation of the industry's top science-fiction roleplaying game? As with any sort of creativity, the answer tends to be: *lots of stuff*. That is why the history of *Traveller* starts 15 years prior to its initial publication, in 1962, with young Marc Miller a freshman in high school. There, he would meet the first of four major inspirations that would lead to *Traveller*.

It all started with the purchase of *D-Day* (1961), the Charles Roberts wargame of the Allied landings in France during World War II. *D-Day* was a milestone in board-based wargaming, later credited with being both the first commercial wargame to be set in World War II and to use a hex grid – and Miller had no idea what to do with it. He and a friend, Steve Kalma, puzzled over it and eventually the game went on a shelf of honour, un-played (for the moment).

Meanwhile, Marc Miller was also a science-fiction fan. That fandom accelerated a few years later in college, courtesy of a bodega with a huge collection of cover-stripped *Astounding Science-Fiction* magazines (1930–Present) that lay between the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle campus and Miller's commuter train. Miller would regularly buy an issue for his long ride home during his first year at university. After reading each issue through, he would throw it away. In that fashion he read every single short story and novel written for *Astounding* for a few decades of the late Golden Age.

Miller's third inspiration came after he had moved down to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus, where he would finish work on a sociology BA. Around 1968, he took a class from Professor Lou Gold that included roleplaying exercises. They centered around a political nominating convention where the students took on the roles of politicians and their aides, researched their positions and then tried to get them nominated. Miller would later note that Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax had invented not the



entire concept of roleplaying but rather *recreational* roleplaying games because Professor Gold's classroom exercises were definitely roleplaying. (Sadly, Gold's approach was not well-received and he would soon leave the University of Illinois as a result.)

Finally, Miller was a member of ROTC while at college and that led to a commission in the Air Defense Artillery branch of the US Army. After serving in the 4th Battalion, 61st Air Defense Artillery at Fort Carson Colorado, which was armed with 20mm Vulcan electric gatling guns, Miller went to Vietnam where he would serve in the 16th Combat Aviation Group and the 23rd Administration Company in the Americal Division in Chu Lai. Miller's military experience would inevitably form a fourth inspiration for what followed.

However Miller's stint in the Army (and later the Reserves) did more than just contribute to the military feeling of *Traveller*; it also gave him an opportunity to go back to school thanks to the G.I. Bill. This final link, as important as all the inspirations before it, is what would lead Miller to a group of like-minded gamers and in short order, a workshop of game designers.

FROM GAMERS TO DESIGNERS 1972-1973

What enables the creation of the industry's top science-fiction roleplaying game? It takes a workshop. Flash-forward to 1972, with Marc Miller reentering university thanks to the G.I. Bill. He planned to continue his studies as an 'unclassified' student, allowing him to take a break from work and pursue the well-rounded education that his previous Sociology degree had precluded. Upon arriving at the Illinois State University (ISU) campus in Normal, Illinois, Miller fell in with the ISU Games Club, run by speech and communications major Frank Chadwick and Korean War vet Rich Banner and attended by others who would be crucial to the future of *Traveller*, such as history major Loren Wiseman.

At the Games Club, Miller at last learned how to play wargames. This was thanks to a program that taught club members games they did not know by pairing them up with experienced players. Miller requested to learn Jim Dunnigan's World War II wargame *France, 1940* (1972) and was paired up with geography professor Dr. Southard Mowdry to learn the game. The professor taught the rules and the two played a sample turn. Following that introduction, Miller would soon move on to other games such as: Jim Dunnigan's *Red Star/White Star* (1972), a game of combat in West Germany in the '70s; Philip Pritchard's *Lensman* (1969), an early science-fiction game; John Prados' *Year of the Rat* (1972), a Vietnam game that both Miller and Chadwick decided they could not win; and of course that treasured *D-Day*, off the shelf at last. These games were played in the ISU Student Union, open 24 hours a day, with sessions often lasting until two or three in the morning.

Meanwhile, the Games Club was also tinkering with game design. Rich Banner, who was both a graphic designer and someone who knew his way around the university system, got the ball rolling when he requested around \$250 in funds for the game club, which he used to print a thousand 22x28 inches blank hex sheets (900 on white, 100 on light blue for naval games). Many wargames were thereafter fought on hand-constructed terrain, to see what effect they would have on the battles; simultaneously, Miller used the sheets to design the first iteration of *Triplanetary*, a hex-based space combat game that he completed by the end of 1972. Frank Chadwick led the designers in their next step when he put together a proposal for tapping into the university's educational innovation funds to establish Simulation, Research, Analysis and Design, or SIMRAD. It was to be a game-design club that would work with professors to create educational simulations for their classroom.

The proposal was accepted, and for about 18 months, from late 1972 through 1973, Miller, Chadwick, Banner, Wiseman and other members of the Games Club created games. They finalised around eight total, more than half of them roleplaying games. These games taught economics, history and politics, focusing on topics such as the 1896 US presidential election, the 1930s Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia, the Salem Witch Trials, deforestation of the American northwest, bond issuance and more.

The experience that the SIMRAD designers gained from this work was vital because it provided them with their first training in formal game development – requiring research and purposeful design on a deadline. It was experience that they would bring to any number of future games, including of course *Traveller*. However, the experience of SIMRAD was also destined to be short-lived. Although the

'We sat around and drank Cokes and designed and played wargames all night long for months.'

— Marc Miller, Interview, *The Escapist* (January 2010)

university had initially been willing to fund SIMRAD, there was concern over classroom products being created by students without proper academic credentials. Thus, ISU quickly sunset the program.

Fortunately, the game designers of SIMRAD saw the writing on the wall. By the time that SIMRAD shut down, they had already begun publishing themselves as GDW, or Game Designers' Workshop.

BUILDING A PUBLISHING EMPIRE

1973-1977

GDW, the company that would soon become the creator and first publisher of *Traveller*, is said to have been founded on June 22, 1973. In actuality, no one remembers the precise date but June 22 felt appropriate because it was the anniversary of the June 22, 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany as part of Operation: Barbarossa. That date had meaning because it tied to GDW's initial release, a wargame called *Drang Nach Osten!* ('Drive to the East!', 1973), which simulated World War II on the Eastern Front from June 22, 1941 to March 31, 1942.

The creation of the game was a mammoth undertaking that represented a long-held desire in the wargaming community to expand the scope of the historic campaigns found in Avalon Hill's classic *Stalingrad!* (1963) game, which had similarly covered the Eastern front from 1941-1943. SPI and other wargaming publishers had talked about producing a multi-map game for the campaign but it was the members of the ISU Games Club who finally took up the task, with Banner producing a massive five-map board as the foundation of the game.

Drang Nach Osten! was originally intended to be a one-off: members of the ISU Games Club contributed money to produce it on a one-time basis. When it did well enough to quickly pay off those contributions, Chadwick and Banner decided to create a company: GDW. Chadwick, Banner, and Miller came onboard as partners, with Loren Wiseman joining as a junior partner with a 10% stake, contributing a game design rather than financial funding.



Initial rules for the workshop were also laid out, such as a decision that all of the company's releases would be work-for-hire owned by GDW but that if the company ever dissolved, rights would revert back to the people who had contributed the most to them. So GDW was born – although incorporation proper would wait several more years, until September 14, 1979.

With GDW now an actual company, the world of *Drang Nach Osten!* began to grow. That began with *Unentschieden* ('Stalemate', 1973), which expanded the campaign forward in time to 1944. By that point, GDW's Eastern Front games were being considered as a trilogy. In time, they would become the Europa series and expand to 11 games under GDW, produced from 1973-1987 – and later even more from other publishers. Obviously, the creators at the ISU Games Club had big ambitions. Their publication of *Drang Nach Osten!* and *Unentschieden* was just the start.

The vast majority of GDW's early production was historic wargames. That included Wiseman's Rome-based *Eagles* (1974), the game design that was his contribution to GDW's founding, and Miller's *Chaco* (1974), based on his SIMRAD design – which he acknowledged had been an educational failure despite being a great wargame. However, two other wargames were of special note for the

future of *Traveller* because of their focus on science-fiction. The first was Miller's initial game design, *Triplanetary* (1973), which was published late in 1973 as GDW's third release.

Triplanetary was important primarily because it signaled that GDW was going to produce more than just historic wargames. However, *Triplanetary* was more than that: it was one of the earliest hobbyist science-fiction board games. Although a few small-press games such as Philip Pritchard's *Lensman* predated it, *Triplanetary* was published prior to larger companies like SPI, Avalon Hill, TSR and Metagaming Concepts entering the category. Granted, it was pretty small press itself, with just 1,000 copies printed in 1973 (and another 3,000 over the next three years).

The game was a starship combat game that was most notable for its innovation of vector-based movement. The battling starships moved in accordance with the rules of physics, maintaining momentum and also responding to gravity wells. Rather than requiring complex math, the vectors were managed by simple arrows drawn on the maps, using those hundreds of printed hex sheets (when Miller was testing) and later a printed sheet of acetate (when *Triplanetary* shipped). The idea of vector-based movement for starship combat has been much copied, including in the *Traveller* board game *Mayday* (1978). But it started here.

About six months after GDW's founding, and shortly after the publication of *Triplanetary*, several of GDW's principals visited the offices of SPI in New York for an event that SPI was holding. At the time, SPI was the young underdog of the wargame industry, bringing much of the innovation to the



Triplanetary – 1973

Triplanetary,
second edition
1981



wargaming field and shaking up older publisher Avalon Hill. The GDW crew were thus delighted to learn that SPI staffers knew who they were and were entirely welcoming. They met Jim Dunnigan and Redmond Simonsen, two of the most notable creators in the wargaming field and got to watch some playtest sessions. In that visit, GDW saw the shape of their possible future.

Mind you, GDW was still very small at the time, primarily operating out of Chadwick and Miller's apartment, which contained cartons of game components and piles of assembled boxes. Orders would arrive in the mail, then the assembled games would be shipped out to the post office in Miller's green Volkswagen Beetle. The art department was similarly run out of Banner's house. But, the company was growing and after Miller was infamously buried under a landslide of *Triplanetary* games, GDW rented a real office space which they would use for decades — ultimately outlasting SPI by nearly that span.

GDW continued to tinker with science-fiction games in the wake of *Triplanetary*, even though their production schedule remaining focused on historic wargames. It would take a few years before another achieved publication but ultimately both their successes and their failures would be important to the *Traveller* RPG to come, especially two different board games both called *Imperium*.

Science–Fiction Strategy

Technically, science-fiction games are almost as old as the boardgaming industry. Although modern board games date back to the 1820s, they only took off in the 1880s thanks to one George S. Parker. One of the first science-fiction board games was then *A Trip to Mars* (1903), a roll-and-move racetrack game typical of the era. A trickling of family releases in the science-fiction vein continued into the 1960s, many of them abstract, others licensed from popular brands such as Dan Dare, Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, Doctor Who, Time Tunnel, Thunderbirds, Tom Swift, Star Trek and other media of the era.

Things changed around 1969 with the advent of more strategic science-fiction games, most of them produced by fan-based wargame publishers. Thus *Lensman* (1969) appeared from Spartan International, *Revolt* (1970) from the International Federation of Wargaming (IFW) and the *Star Trek Battle Manual* (1972) from Lou Zocchi. The year 1973, when Zocchi reprinted his unlicensed *Star Trek* game as the more professional *Alien Space Battle Manual* (1973), and when GDW published 1,000 copies of their vector-based space combat game, *Triplanetary* (1973), was either the end of strategic science-fiction games as a small-press phenomenon or the beginning of strategic science-fiction games as a mass-market innovation: it's sometimes hard to see the borders.

Certainly, strategic science-fiction was becoming a mass-market phenomenon by 1974, when wargaming upstart SPI leapt in with *StarForce* (1974), a massive game of space combat fought across 74 star systems and the start of a trilogy that would later include

Outreach (1976) and *StarSoldier* (1977). Industry leader Avalon Hill followed suit two years later with *Starship Troopers* (1976), perhaps the first game of tactical science-fiction troop conflict, as well as the popular factional wargame *Dune* (1979) – the latter by Eon Productions, the small-press publishers of one of the most legendary hobby science-fiction games of all, *Cosmic Encounter* (1977).

The most notable milestone for the science-fiction board game explosion might have been the foundation of Metagaming Concepts, not for their debut 4X space game, *Stellar Conquest* (1975) but for their magazine, *The Space Gamer* (1975–1980+). This new periodical focused on science-fiction gaming and was running 2,000–3,000 subscribers by 1977.

Of course, the explosion of science-fiction strategy gaming ran smack-dab into the advent of roleplaying games following the debut of *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974). At first, it was not clear who would emerge on top, as even *D&D* publisher TSR was experimenting with science-fiction games, beginning with the wargame *Warriors of Mars* (1974) and moving deeper into space with *Star Probe* (1974) and *Star Empires* (1977). But soon, even *Space Gamer* was printing articles about *D&D* and the wargame companies that had experimented with science-fiction games were moving onto roleplaying games, including SPI's *DragonQuest* (1980), Avalon Hill's *James Bond 007* (1983), Metagaming's *The Fantasy Trip* (1977) and of course GDW's *Traveller* (1977).

It was a rare company that maintained a focus on science-fiction strategy into the '80s, although there were a few, such as Task Force Games, the creator of *Star Fleet Battles* (1979), and GDW, who was able to leverage later science-fiction games off of the setting of *Traveller* itself.

A TALE OF TWO IMPERIUMS

1974-1977

The first Imperium began development around 1974 and was intended to follow on from *Triplanetary*. Where *Triplanetary* was focused on spaceship combat, the first Imperium was instead a space opera of galactic empires, with the humans of Earth surrounded by many interstellar factions, including the mercenary Dorsai (drawn from Gordan R. Dickson's novels) as well as a quartet of aliens: the lion-like Aslan, the wolf-like Vargr, the quadruped Centaurs and the hive-mind Hive (which itself was divided into three factions).

Although the game was focused on slower-than-light economic empire building, it also had a more personal element, in line with the man-to-man tactical wargames that were then appearing in parallel to the young roleplaying industry. Each player took on the role of the ruler of their empire but they also had a son or daughter who could grow up over the course of the game and eventually enter a service such as the navy, the scouts or the civil service. These characters could provide bonuses in the game and they could also be placed in danger, possibly resulting in their death!

Although that first Imperium saw play at GDW from 1974 through 1976, it would never see print because it was one of a few different science-fiction war games that GDW was developing at that time. One of the others eventually won the publication lottery, a game originally called 'StarFleet'.

StarFleet was an asymmetrical two-player wargame where one player took on the role of scrappy Earth barbarians and the other the role of a governor representing a decaying galactic empire. Each player, with their very different resources, had the ultimate goal of controlling the map over a campaign of several games.

While GDW was considering *StarFleet* for publication, distributor and manufacturer Lou Zocchi warned GDW that the name conflicted with the Star Trek setting. At the same time, GDW decided that they



were unlikely to ever publish the original Imperium, because it was a comparatively amateur design from 1974 and because technology had already passed it by. Thus, GDW turned *StarFleet* into *Imperium* (1977), which was published at the end of 1977 – which we will see was about four months after the publication of *Traveller* (1977) itself. At the time, the only connection between the two was that elements of *Traveller's* universe design, such as its jump routes, had inspired some of the concepts in *Imperium*.

There was one peculiarity to the *Imperium* release: it was originally published not under the GDW label but as Conflict Games, or the Conflict Game Company (CGC). This was a company that had originally been founded by John Hill around 1971 to publish his own games, including the 'crime simulation' game *The Brotherhood* (1972) and a number of wargames, the best-known of which is *Bar-Lev: The Yom-Kippur War of 1973* (1974), which