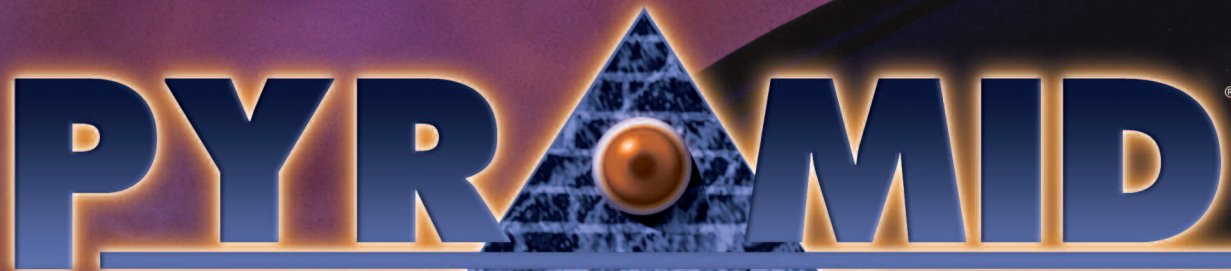


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/35 September '11

ALIENS



ALIEN DISADVANTAGES

by **Steven Marsh**

THE TROJAN GAMBIT

by **Michele Armellini**

MAKING SOMETHING ALIEN

by **Alan Leddon**

ALIEN STARTING CONDITIONS

by **Stephen P. Kohler**

WARGRAVE STATION

by **David L. Pulver**

WELL PAST ALIEN

by **J. Edward Tremlett**

FIRST CONTACT

by **Megan McDonald**

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Article Colors

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)

Dark Blue: GURPS Features

Purple: Systemless Features

Green: Distinguished Columnists

COVER ART

John Zeleznik

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Greg Hyland

IN THIS ISSUE

Whether lurking in the dunes near a desert crash or lying in wait beyond the stars, aliens have hidden in the periphery of public imagination for generations. With this month's *Pyramid*, it is time to put them in the spotlight.

GURPS provides a solid framework to build the alien of your dreams, but sometimes you can use help getting those dreams started. *Alien Disadvantages* offers new ways to look at existing traits, with tips and tricks on how to take the seemingly familiar stock tools of the **GURPS Basic Set** and make them feel out of this world.

Everyone who's suffered through a biology class learns to fear parasites . . . and those who've suffered through parasites themselves have even greater fears. However, Michele Armellini, author of several **GURPS** supplements, knows there is something potentially even scarier than being possessed by parasites. Learn the shocking truth – including a threatening race with **GURPS** stats – in *The Trojan Gambit*.

Are you looking to make an extraterrestrial's thoughts, motives, and appearance truly different? Then you need insight into *Making Something Alien*.

Do you need something to bring together a lot of alien artifacts – plus a few heretofore-unknown (deceased) aliens? Your next stop: *Wargrave Station*. This installment of David L. Pulver's *Eidetic Memory* includes **GURPS Spaceships** stats for one of the derelict vessels.

Go *Well Past Alien* with six new extraterrestrial species, suitable for any spacefaring setting. Each one is at least one aspect short of being able to easily interact with baseline humans, and each is more dangerous than the last.

Everyone comes from somewhere, and *Alien Starting Conditions* presents a quick-and-easy method for coming up with a homeworld . . . and how those roots can affect a species' outlook.

Once you have aliens, you need to make *First Contact*. This short-and-sweet collection of adventure seeds offers six ways to encounter them, plus a half-dozen ways for them to encounter *us*.

Steven Marsh has problems with aliens in his *Random Thought Table*, and the issue is rounded out by the usual fun stuff in *Odds and Ends*, featuring *Murphy's Rules*.

Whether you're facing first contact or are the last human standing, we have something to augment the alien experience. Humanity is known for its creativity – and this issue proves it!

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FROM THE EDITOR

A DUNGEON FULL OF . . . ALIENS?!

For those who've been reading *Pyramid* for a while (and special thanks to all of you who make this possible!), you may have noticed that we've been drifting away from the "past/present/future" divide of our themes. We're not avoiding issues set in specific eras, but we're also open to the possibility of issues that aren't tied to any point in time, or ones that span periods.

I mention this, tangentially, because our alien-themed issue must seem like it would be a logical science-fiction issue – which it is! However, much of the advice here is good for any presentation of the "alien" – the different, the unusual, the unearthly.

We hope you'll remember this issue when you start up a new fantasy game and are looking to inject some intrigue with a new subterranean race. Or when you're trying to produce a

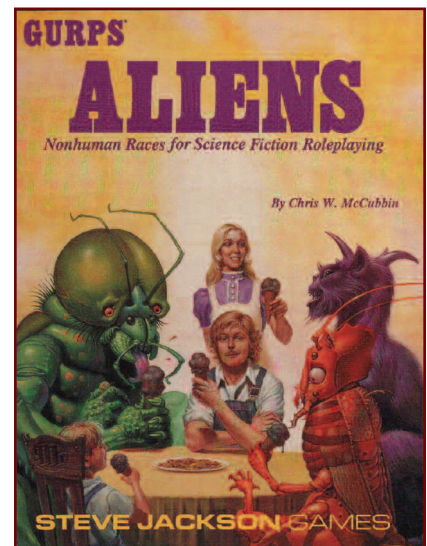
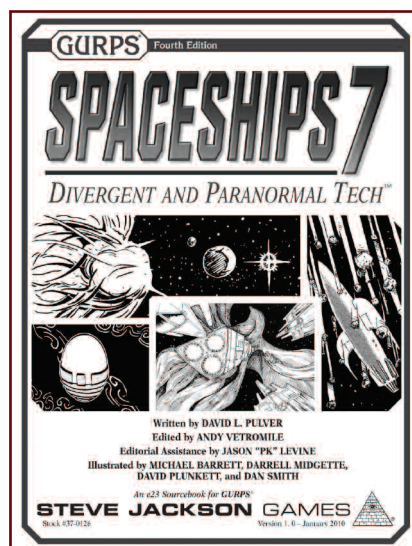
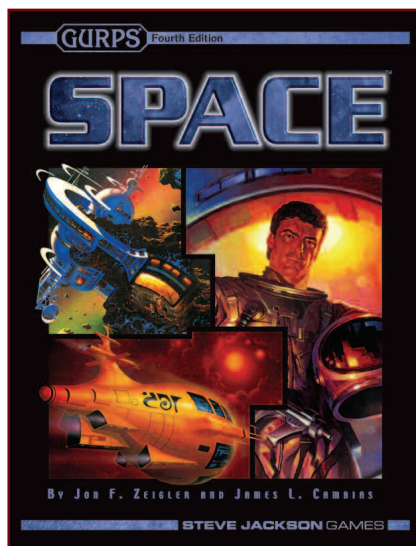
wildly different human culture in a cliffhangers campaign. And, of course, when you're coming up with a new extraterrestrial encounter.

Good gamers take their inspiration from everywhere. *GURPS* is especially great about mixing pieces . . . and *Pyramid* is a great spot for those little bits you won't find anywhere else.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of strange visitors landing on your doorstep . . . how was this issue? You can send shadowy missives to the black-clad agents at pyramid@sjgames.com, or expose your innermost thoughts on the alien conspiracy publicly online at forums.sjgames.com.

Finally, for those looking to write for *Pyramid* – like the new names appearing in this issue did! – information is on our website at pyramid.sjgames.com.



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ALIEN DISADVANTAGES

BY STEVEN MARSH

When it comes to designing interesting aliens, *GURPS* has a dirty little secret . . . which isn't terribly little, isn't very dirty, and isn't much of a secret to folks who pay attention.

From a game-design standpoint, disadvantages in *GURPS* are most concerned with *effects*, not *causes*. In other words, the name and description of a disadvantage isn't as important as the game effects.

For the would-be fabricator of oddball extraterrestrials, this fact opens up a wide number of possibilities. Since the game effects of disadvantages take primacy over the descriptions, it's trivial to tweak the description and implications, provided the effects are the same.

The fundamentals of this technique are covered in *Modifying Existing Disadvantages* (pp. B165-166). However, as a design exercise, focusing on the *effects* and working backward to the *cause* can allow the creation of strange and interesting possibilities – ones that feel truly alien. Here, then, is a look at many of the disadvantages from the *Basic Set* – with an otherworldly outlook.

Limited Disadvantages

As described on p. B110, disadvantages can be tweaked with limitations. These can greatly change the flavor of a disadvantage . . . in a way that doesn't make sense for human-based campaigns, but that can be justified or easily hand-waved for alien beings.

From a conceptual standpoint, the easiest one to have firmly in mind when mulling over alien possibilities is “half the time” – which is worth -20%. Coming up with a good hook of why a disadvantage is only limiting half the time can lead to some interesting alien possibilities.

Remember that “limited” disadvantages reduce its value *as a disadvantage*; a -20% limitation on a -20-point disadvantage means it's a trait worth -16 points. (But see *Point Break*, p. 9, for more insight.)

ABSENT-MINDEDNESS

see p. B122

One of the central unspoken tenets of Absent-Mindedness is that the person is . . . well, absent-minded. It's somewhat assumed that the absent-minded person has the information that's slipping his mind, but can't access it – due to mental quirk or defect.

However, what if that's not the case? What if what humans call “absent-minded” in an alien entity is actually a result of a different thought process?

As one possibility, perhaps the race is a computer-based hive-mind species that “offloads processing power” of member consciousness to the greater hive. A member seems “absent-minded” because the data has been uploaded elsewhere, and accessing it requires conscious effort (the IQ, Per, or Will rolls listed in the disadvantage) to get the requested information re-downloaded to the individual.

Or perhaps the alien species experiences time in a fundamentally different fashion. Everything that isn't in the being's immediate frame of reference is mentally shifted to something akin to hazy “long-term” memory. In this case, attempting to snap out of the Absent-Mindedness feels similar to trying to remember (say) specific details of a childhood birthday party.

ADDICTION AND ALCOHOLISM

see p. B122-123

A central assumption of the substance-abuse-based disadvantages is that the addicted individual in some way consciously comprehends his addictions. However, what if this isn't the case?

As one example, maybe the alien species was uplifted by an individual with an addiction (or such an individual was – by fact or legend – a key member of the uplifting team). The race came to view “sapience” and “addiction” as synonymous: “We drink, as Founder Rosen did, so we can think.” In this case, the entire species may not recognize the problems associated with its addictions, since they've literally had them as long as they can collectively remember.

In such a scenario, outsiders may be tempted to attempt to “cure” the species by showing them there is a nonaddicted way to view the world. However, this may lead to greater complications. What if the species is well-tempered and functional through its addictions (discounting the specific problems the addictions cause, of course) – but transforms into a ruthless/dangerous/psychopathic/nonsapient race when the addiction is broken? This could lead to a challenging moral dilemma . . . especially for any heroes who fought (successfully or otherwise) their own addictions.

WELL PAST ALIEN ENCOUNTERS BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Within the context of most science-fiction settings – especially in worlds of space opera – the vast majority of aliens aren't really all *that* alien. They may not always be humanoid, and their social habits and societal mores may be off, odd, or downright weird. However, they can at least stand their ground with humans within a cosmopolitan universe, as they tend to be physical beings that operate on the same scale as we do, and can – and will – communicate with us.

Of course, exceptions always exist. Generally speaking, the further a species deviates from the three goalposts of scale, physicality, and communication, the more alien it becomes. In the absence of such technical wonders as universal translators or language implants – or in cases where they simply *do not work* – dealing with such beings can be difficult, and quite possibly very dangerous.

But what's a space game without the thrill of snatching discovery from the jaws of cold oblivion?

In the spirit of fostering some interstellar confusion in a cosmopolitan science-fiction setting, the following very alien races, anomalies, and hazards are presented in generic terms. They all are at least one goalpost short of being able to easily interact with baseline humans, and are listed from least to most dangerous. Humanity's interactions with them are detailed, and the problems keeping them from having a true meeting of the minds with us are given.

THE PERSEUS CUBES

When humanity sent forerunner ships off into the Perseus Arm of the galaxy, their long-range scanners kept getting strange readings. They seemed to indicate the existence of large metallic objects, found singly or in groups, which were clearly moving but had no energy signature. While noteworthy, they weren't planets or alien spacecraft, so their sightings were catalogued and left for another time.

It wouldn't be until the colonization of planet P-B-675 that the objects were viewed up close. A cluster

of them were gathered around one of that planet's outer moons, giving the ship a chance to send a probe. What they saw challenged many ideas on xenobiology, and posed questions that have yet to be satisfactorily answered.

The beings were giant metal cubes, ranging anywhere from about 15' to 106' per side. Their sides were smooth and featureless, and they seemed to have no limbs. They had no visible physical senses yet were apparently able to perceive the approach of the probe. They also had no visible means of propulsion but were able to move closer to the probe, or away from it.

Lost in Space Translation

As a rule of thumb, the more challenging it is to communicate with an extraterrestrial, the more *alien* that extraterrestrial seems.

Physical or written speech is "normal," no matter how difficult or exotic the alien tongue may be. Even mental telepathy is "normal" to an extent, so long as we're hearing words or seeing recognizable images. But what do you do when the aliens communicate in ways we can neither comprehend nor easily detect, and cannot readily respond in?

There's an entire universe of possibilities for alternate modes of communication. They could speak through smells, tastes, pheromones, bodily waste, or shifting lights. They could employ temperature or pressure changes, radiation levels, and magnetic waves, which baseline humans would have a hard time picking up on and replicating without special modifications or equipment.

There's also the issue of whether they *want* to talk to us at all. In order for proper communication to occur, both parties must be trying to converse, and be aware that the other party *is* speaking. Otherwise, it's all missed cues and background noise, perhaps coupled with one party's haughty insistence that these tiny, bipedal beings aren't intelligent enough to bother conversing with.

ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: info@sjgames.com. Resources include:

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Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for errata, updates, Q&A, and much

more. To discuss *GURPS* with SJ Games staff and fellow gamers, come to our forums at forums.sjgames.com. The *Pyramid* web page is pyramid.sjgames.com.

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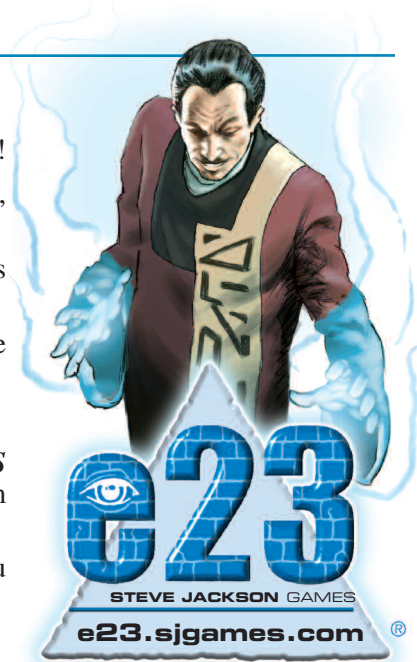
Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

GURPS rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book.

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