

Joe Fugate's 2004 Answers About DGP and Traveller

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Introduction

(by Joe himself)

You never know who might be lurking on the forum.

I was googling around and found this topic on this forum and realized I never got around to answering people's questions.

Lots of interesting and amusing speculation about the history of DGP, Roger Sanger, and Traveller.

In the time that has transpired, I have forgotten enough that I won't be able to answer rules questions. But I can certainly answer other questions as time permits, as long as I am not totally inundated with questions.

Some of the Topics Covered

A.I.	GDW	Marc	Starship	Zhodani
Aslan	Grand Tour	NPC	Operator's	
Big Plan	Hivers	Primordial	Manual	
DGP	Imperial	SOM	Task System	
Dulinor	Lucan		WBH	

The Questions

Who is Joe Fugate? (Answered by Mike West)

Joe Fugate was the founder of Digest Group Publications (DGP).

DGP was responsible for some of the best Traveller material from the late CT through the MT eras, and in fact were main drivers through MT. While some (including me) may disparage some of their work, they produced some of the best material ever produced for Traveller. (E.g. GC/GS/WBH, SOM)

The other great thing about Mr. Fugate and DGP is that he was originally just a "fanboy" who was able to harness that and turn into a direct, published contributor. I always have to respect that!

How did you get into Traveller?

The name of Digest Group Publications is a name that stood for consistently high production value and brought Traveller alive for hundreds of fans. Would the participants like to say a few words about themselves, how the Group members got into Traveller?

I'm glad people still feel our products were well done. They were certainly a labor of love for us all, and the original DGP team was a great bunch that had real synergy. We would bounce ideas off each other all the time, shoot them down, and then come up with better ideas as a result. It's that notion that no one really owned an idea but that our products were the group's output that really helped produce some nice stuff.

Anyhow, to answer the question. For me, I discovered Traveller in a hobby shop shortly after the Star Wars phenomenon hit in the late 70s. I was fascinated with the idea that you could "play" Star Wars with this Role Playing game, and the whole idea of an RPG was novel at the time, with D&D just coming out as well.

My gaming heritage was in SPI and Avalon Hill war games, and I certainly played my share of them, including War in Europe and War in the Pacific ... both monster games.

As more Traveller products started to come out, I began to get caught up in the background of the Imperium and the Spinward Marches, and Star Wars faded into the background.

I met Gary Thomas at work (I was a computer programmer) and introduced him to the game. Gary was really into the *role* playing aspect of the game and showed us all how to get in and stay in character (via ad hoc play acting) during the game.

This added a whole new dimension of fun to the game. Gary background and interest was in mathematics and linguistics, and he could speak some 8 languages, as well as read and write languages such as Sanskrit.

I wanted to learn more about the Traveller Universe and decided maybe one way to do it was to ask Marc Miller if we could write for the game. We sent Marc some samples from what would become Travellers Digest issue 1.

Marc was very accommodating and offered to license us to produce product for a very attractive price ... Gary was flabbergasted that 1) I had the gall to ask Marc Miller directly if we could be licensees, and 2) that Marc would be so accommodating to us.

That was the fall of 1984 ...

I introduced Bob and Nancy Parker to the game ... they came to me via an ad I had posted in the hobby shop for gamers. They hung around and became part of the group.

Rob Caswell wrote us as a fan and sent us samples of his artwork. It was good stuff, so we started to use it. Rob would call us and kibitz on things Traveller for hours on end, and we found the discussions to be very useful, and he was full of fun ideas for the game.

Deb Zeigler is Rob's significant other (now wife) and her quiet and contemplative nature made you sit up and listen when she had something to say because it was always worth listening to.

Of course, there's my wife, Patty, who was never a hard-core Traveller fan, but she loved SF, so she understood our passion. She would mostly play hostess during the work sessions and playtests.

Once in a great while we would get her to participate in a game.

So that's how it all started. I'll move on to the next question in my next post in a day or so.

How did Digest Group Publications begin? What inspired you start publishing for Traveller?

I think I somewhat covered this in my first answer, but let me elaborate a bit more.

I had a basically selfish reason for wanting to get involved publishing things for Traveller. I wanted to explore parts of the Traveller universe and to have an official "need to know" on certain aspects of the background, or be in a position to make it up if no one knew.

I was not especially interested in getting a lot of fame, I was more interested in becoming so knowledgeable about the background that I would know the answer to most any question anyone could ask me, and it would be the official right answer.

In effect, I would know it almost as well as if I actually "lived" in the genre. I didn't actually want to live there, but it was a fun "alternate reality" to enjoy with my friends, and I wanted it to be as real as possible.

Then I worked to assemble a team around me who were each very good at helping me flesh out this detail, and in making a gaming session a real hoot.

The biggest eye-opener for me was to actually ROLE PLAY in character during a game. What a kick, once I realized you could do this! Being an old war gamer, I tended to think in terms of game mechanics and completely overlooked the element of staying in character while playing the game.

A real joy for me came one time when I was refereeing a game at a RPG convention. The group was trying to smuggle some stuff into the system on the sly, and I decided to create some suspense by having one of the local System Defense Boats perform a routine boarding check.

The group freaked, but then tried to play it cool. I acted as the SDB commander, and in character walked on board their ship, asked to speak to the commander, and be allowed to examine their manifest on their ships computer and to do a visual inspection of their hold. All in very official tones, trying very hard to keep a straight face while they tried to keep from looking freaked.

I conducted a pretty superficial inspection, but asked some potentially embarrassing questions that they cleverly answered in a way that sidestepped the issue unless I actually suspected them of foul play (I already assumed the SDB commander wouldn't do anything unless they screwed up and let something slip).

They did well, so I rounded up my inspection troops (marines in body armor, by the way), wished the captain a safe voyage and returned to my SDB.

The crew and captain heaved a big sigh of relief and the guy playing the captain replied, "Well played! I used to be in the coast guard, and you played that role perfectly!"

Of course I was shooting from the hip doing impromptu roleplaying, but it sure was fun! Of everyone in the group, Gary was by far the best at this. He even used his linguistics background to figure out how a Vargr would speak Galanglic with a Gvegh accent. What a kick!

What is one of the operating principles that made DGP tick?

We would often take a contrary view to drive out each other's assumptions.

We used to do that to each other at Digest Group all the time. At first, it can make you really angry, especially later when you realize that you've been had!

But I enjoy this sort of dialog as long as everyone shakes hands and remains friends at the end of the day. I think this sort of interchange leads to the best ideas and is one of the "secrets" to how DGP was able to produce products that were as good as they are.

We "went for it" in our discussions, giving everyone their chance to air their views, no matter how absurd or "off-the-wall".

And I personally believe in life this is true as well. If you disdain or get angry at those who diametrically oppose your view without ever examining it with an open mind, you are losing a golden opportunity to bolster and strengthen your own views.

If at all possible, it's best to let the other side be heard, and don't let emotions get the best of you. Deal with it rationally and consider the evidence as if you were pitching the idea and see if it holds water.

You might be surprised at what you find.

How much were you still able to play Traveller once you made the leap from fan to DGP?

I actually played Traveller **more** during the DGP days because we were firm believers in playtesting. We took turns refereeing, and we got to see each other's style and learn from each other.

Plus we referee'd a few games at RPG conventions, which was always a treat for the gamers -- to have one of the "biggies" ref your game!

Let me digress a moment and say all the fame is okay, but it at times could be embarrassing ... the hero worship. I put on my pants one leg at a time just like you do. We were fortunate to be at a time and place and to have enough gall to ask some of the right questions, but that's it.

Did you ever play Traveller (or have the urge to play Traveller) after DGP closed? Do you ever feel the urge to play Traveller today, even if only for nostalgia's sake?

Did I have the urge to play Traveller after DGP closed? Not really. One reason I got out of the biz was burnout. We all held regular jobs and worked DGP on the side, often many long hours.

Unfortunately, I let workaholism get the best of me and really gave my wife and kids the short end of the stick during those years. They know the DGP years as the "dark times" in our family.

At the end of the day, my family comes first and were I to do it all over again, I probably would not start DGP. While I enjoyed the gaming side of things immensely during those years and the am still very thankful for all the nice people I got to know (Marc Miller, the Keiths, Tom Peters, all the DGP staff, and many others ...), I just about wrecked my home life doing it.

Sure, I'm proud of what we accomplished, but were I to get back into writing for Traveller again these days, I would probably get disowned by my family.

Plus my views on Science Fiction in general have changed. I have come to like the idealistic space opera style of SF, with clear good guys and bad guys, and basically a good yarn story. A fantasy where I can escape for a few hours and come back feeling good.

Star Trek, for example, has gotten too sophisticated for my tastes and I've lost interest, to be honest with you.

And we were adding so much detail to the Traveller universe that it was getting harder and harder to keep it all straight without contradicting ourselves somewhere.

So I just grew tired of it all. I still have a few trinkets from those days, and I proudly own Craig Farley's original cover painting for World Builder's Handbook, our all-time best selling product. But that's it. Roger has **everything** else.

Would I play Traveller again today? Again, probably not. The DGP years fulfilled my urge to find out about the Traveller universe in great detail. I had my personal druthers of what I would have liked to see done with the genre, and then there was what made the best marketing sense.

My heart of hearts is still in Classic Traveller. The Rebellion seemed prudent to inject lots of new adventure possibilities into the mix, but my favorite adventures came from the pre-Rebellion era, running one of Marc's early adventures or one of the Keith's adventures.

What do you think the best product that DGP produced was and why particularly?

Oh boy, a tough one. They were all fun products to produce, but if I had to single out one of them it was the one internally we called SOPM (saup' - em).

The Starship Operator's Manual. For the first time, all the technology of a starship was described in great detail. I could envision working on a jump drive or the thrusters and I now understood and could actually picture what I was doing! What fun!

The Old Timer's sidebars were a real kick to write, and helped take what could have been a really dry subject and inject it with some real life. Many people told us their favorite part of SOPM was the Old Timer's remarks.

One of the things I think made all our products work well is how we illustrated them. Many game companies saw their products as mainly text, with holes for images to break up the text. But the images could be just about anything as long as they looked like they fit the genre. Different styles of art were okay, even conflicting details, as long as the image sort of fit.

But that's not how we saw it. The art was as much a part of the presentation as the text, if not more so. It all had to hang together. And we worked on upgrading our art quality as we went. My favorite cover artist was Craig Farley. The guy is an artistic genius.

One of his clever keys was to take great pains in the face, and especially the eyes. Lots of detail and expression in the face of his subject. As you drew away from the subject, the detail level dropped substantially, but that did not matter. The rest of the image was balanced and well proportioned, and had lighting that supported the mood very well.

You were immediately impacted by the quality of the subject's face and expression, and it spoke volumes to you. The rest of the image just played a supporting role to the subject, but because the face was so well detailed you were tricked into thinking the whole painting was very detailed. Clever, and very effective.

Rob Caswell was an excellent art director, and for him the art had to tell the story too, as accurately as possible. He carefully correographed every image in the products he art directed, only working with artists he knew could deliver exactly what he wanted in an image. Rob would write several paragraphs to the artists on each image, leaving no detail out as to how the image needed to look.

As to art, some of our later Traveller's Digests and the MTJ's were under Rob's guidance, and it shows. Some of the best art we ever published is in those later issues.

Were you surprised GDW granted DGP stewardship over the Traveller line?

How surprised were you it when GDW granted your company de facto stewardship over the Traveller rules and setting from roughly 1987 to 1990? Was this a specific decision made between you and Marc Miller or was it more of a gradual evolutionary process? Considering how small in personnel and resources your company was, how overwhelmed or intimidated did you feel at being the head of something with such a large legacy and following, or was this a concern at all?

Gary was flabbergasted that Marc Miller would even give us the time of day, much less a sweet license deal like he did. He just offered it to us, with a contingency that we needed to publish a certain volume of product for it to go into full effect.

We were all over 25, and we sent Marc some samples of our work with our proposal, so that seemed to say to him we were "reliable". From day one, we used Macs and the latest desktop publishing software we could get our hands on. And my wife's career was in the typesetting and printing business, so we had "connections" as they say.

And we went for it! When I look at all the products we produced, it's quite a stack of stuff.

During the time, I was too inexperienced in the ways of the gaming biz to know whether or not I should be "overwhelmed". With what I know today, I should have been more overwhelmed than I was.

But we just took it a day at a time. Excitement carried us a long ways. Then fleshing out the details and our frequent talks with Marc were a delight. Of course we got to learn about lots of inside skinny on Traveller and GDW's plans for it, as well as weigh in with our own plans.

As we developed a reputation for good work, we even had the like of Steve Jackson (the man himself) coming to us and offering us proposals to do work for them. Our heart was in Traveller, so we weren't interested in things outside that game system.

However, I am happy to say that we did help several people go on to great careers by publishing some of their work first in a DGP product.

Bill Connors went on to work for TSR. Tom Peters got on at NASA. And one of the kids who illustrated for us (his name escapes me at the moment) went on to do special effects work in Hollywood.

As I've mentioned, the greatest burden for me, it turned out, was the difficulty my family went through in those years never seeing me day or night because I was always working on some DGP product or business issue.

I had hoped that it would turn into a full-time venture but it never did. We lost money every year of business except 2, so it was truly a labor of love. My last ditch hope was AI and the thought that it might

put us over the top, but as I looked at the amount of money and time that would have taken to produce and market the game properly, I suddenly came to a realization.

I originally got into the gaming business with the hopes that it would someday become my full time profession so I could set my own hours and be with my family more.

The end result was just the opposite. If I ditched the gaming business and went back to an 8-5 job only, I could be a normal human being again with my family on evenings and weekends.

And I was just plain burned out. 10 years of almost no free time was just too much for me. I grew tired of the gaming business and saw the internet on the horizon and that looked like it was going to change everything anyway.

So we shut down operations, tallied up the debt (into 5 digits at this point), and made a plan to pay back as much of the debt as possible.

A year or so later after this decision, I was happily enjoying being a normal human being again, when this "fan" shows up on my doorstep and wanted to know if he could buy some Traveller stuff. Roger was his name ... Roger Sanger.

Was it Worthwhile?

Taken as a whole, looking at the investment of time and effort into DGP and Traveller that you made and the results obtained, did you have fun? Do you think it was all worthwhile? Put in the same place, would you do it again? Do you wish you had never seen it in the first place or wish it had kept going long after circumstances ended DGP?

I think I've addressed a lot of these questions in my previous few posts.

Was it worthwhile -- absolutely!

Put in the same place, would I do it again? With what I know now ... probably not. And the main reason I gave was the toll on my family. But I'm not one to wallow in the past or cry over spilled milk. That's not what happened. What **did happen** is I chose to write for Traveller and to start a gaming company.

And as a result, I have some great memories and have some works I was a part of that makes me and my DGP colleagues in that special group of "published" authors. Not only do we have the DGP products you are all familiar with, but some of our work was translated into Spanish, German, French, Portuguese, and Japanese!

I have the Japanese book 8 robots, and I can't even find my name in it! I had to have a person who could read Japanese show me where my name was. And they translated it phonetically.

"Joh Foo-gait" Heh, heh. Good job. At least they didn't do it as "Joh Few-gaw-tay". We make it simple ... just like it is spelled. Few-gait.

I would suspect having your work translated into all those foreign languages puts you into a fairly select group of people on the planet. Good job, Marc! To come up with an RPG genre that was popular enough that those writing for it would get their writing translated into all those other languages. Cool stuff.

I thought DGP was dead until Roger Sanger came along and had the gall to propose buying DGP lock, stock, and barrel. I was paying creditors at the time, and have given up DGP as a lost cause, so the thought someone wanted it and would pay some decent money for it all was not expected. It was highly unlikely I would get any other such offers, that was for sure.

And Roger could talk possibilities pretty well and make it sound convincing. So I drafted up the paperwork, Roger gave me the money, and DGP became his baby.

I figured DGP would be like the phoenix rising from the ashes one day to resume as a presence in the gaming industry.

Sadly, that was not to be. What there was of DGP appears to have been squandered and frittered away. In some ways, a sudden death may have been better than the lingering false hopes that seems to have become DGP's legacy.

Did you ever consider making DGP a full time game company?

True, we worked regular day jobs *and* did DGP in the evenings and on weekends. It was grueling, to say the least.

I would have loved to make DGP a full time venture, and yes, that would have made the "two-jobs" element less onerous for sure.

However, it did not work economically, or I would have done it without hesitation. We started out in our day jobs as DGP got rolling doing okay with our salaries. Our day job salaries were low enough we could have replaced them fairly easily had DGP skyrocketed into a smashing success early on.

Instead it grew slowly. We didn't have lots of resources so we could only afford to advertise with dinky ads in Dragon, and even our GDW ads cost what they cost everyone else, although they were cheaper than Dragon so we could afford to make them bigger and more extensive (which made them cost about the same as the Dragon ads).

Over the next few years, we kept pouring any increase in income into improving our product quality, rather than lining our pockets.

Meanwhile, we got hefty raises in our day jobs (computer consulting for Gary and me). By the time DGP could perhaps start to pay us some income, our salaries had doubled in our day jobs, and kept increasing. DGP just could not grow like that.

And the late 1980s was the beginning of the end of the heyday for paper and pencil RPGs, so sales were soft, and our insistence that we focus on Traveller kept a lid on what we might have achieved.

But the fact that GDW and even mighty TSR all have gone the way of the dinosaur indicates that the printed word RPG industry has dwindled considerably from its heyday. I figured following the route of computer gaming would have been the way to grow to the point things could support us. Printing books is one thing, but to do a computer game takes some real big bucks up front ... and I didn't want to go there since I had enough of computer programming at work in my day job.

It's interesting to me that one of the real success stories in the Traveller licensee arena is FASA. They started out publishing some stuff for Traveller, but quickly moved beyond that into other game titles. Then in the late 80s Jordan Weisman began to take FASA off into computer technology with battledroids.

Today, FASA is a subsidiary of Microsoft and is writing games for PCs and the X-Box. DGP would have needed to do the same to make a go of it.

Sorry guys, but the Traveller market, even in its heyday, wasn't more than maybe 10,000 diehard gamers. I'm talking people who bought products now, not anyone who ever played the game.

If any product we produced ever sold half that, it was considered a runaway success! Many of our products sold far fewer copies. Once you factor in production costs (writers, artists, pasteup), printing costs (huge for small product runs under 5,000 copies), license fees to GDW, and the fact that most sales go through distributors at more than half off the cover price ...

In other words, sales never could sustain the growth we needed to go full time. So we produced for the game until we simply burned ourselves out physically and financially.

If the written word RPG market was the size it was in its heyday and we had the internet as a publishing medium, things might have been completely different. But now days, even with PDFs over the internet, I bet the numbers are quite a bit smaller than 10,000 avid Traveller gamers.

The advantage is PDFs over the web don't require near the capital outlay putting a product into print takes, and you can cut out the middle man and keep more of the profits yourself, so the volumes can be smaller.

But my guess is they are too small to support a computer consultant who is used to making \$50+ per hour and has all the business he can handle.

And that became the issue, along with never seeing my family. Did I throw all this money at DGP in hopes it might become self supporting in a dwindling industry, or did I just throw in the towel and go back to a normal life making really good money as a computer consultant, with all the work I could handle.

One was a big gamble, the other a sure thing. And I took the sure thing.

Are you surprised that Traveller is still going so strong after 26 years?

I am surprised, yes. As the internet appeared on the horizon, and I saw the advent of pretty sophisticated video games, I expected the market to move that direction away from "paper and pencil" roleplaying. And wargaming was certainly becoming a shadow of what it once was in the 70s.

I also saw GDW "going south" and didn't expect them to last (which turned out to be true) and Marc was starting to consider employment outside the gaming industry. I knew he would always maintain rights to the game he invented, but I wasn't sure those rights would amount to anything.

I did speak with Marc about his rights to the game and I asked him if he would ever consider selling the rights and he just looked at me, smiled, and said "no". I fully understood. Were I in his shoes, that would have been my answer.

What is Traveller's continuing appeal?

What would you pick, as the single element you think is most responsible for Traveller's continuing appeal after all these years?

Why does the game still seem to be alive and well? One reason is Marc Miller. The guy has imagination and a quiet determination to keep doing something for his baby.

Another reason is the vast adventure possibilities in the game. Its background is compelling with the level of detail it has achieved, and its a refreshing change from more Star Trek or Star Wars.

And speaking of Hollywood, I think the Traveller genre is a great undiscovered third major SF storyline people would stand in line to watch on the big screen. If the producers of SF movies wanted to discover the next Star Wars, I think this is it. Oh well, dream on.

What contribution to Traveller are you most proud of? [the Task System]

There is one comment that I would like to make. In thinking over the DGP years, there is one contribution to Traveller that I am most proud of and that's the task system.

I think that is the one piece of rules that I came up with that "revolutionized" Traveller gaming more than anything else I published.

I'm pretty happy with it's elegant concept, and consistent, simple execution in a session.

I found it especially easy to come up with tasks on the fly and they made use of your character's stats, which for me enhanced the enjoyment of playing a character.

I hope most of you will agree the task system is the one legacy that I leave behind in Traveller that will live on and be used (in one form or another) by most of gamers who play Traveller.

Where did the task system come from?

A little out of previous work of the brothers Keith, a knowledge of 2D6 and 3D6 statistics, and thin air.

I knew I wanted something you could do on the fly if needed, plus I wanted not only difficulties, but time to do the task. I also knew I wanted skill to be a big part, with your attributes also playing a factor.

I wanted attributes to help, but not overpower skill, so the divide by 5 thing was born. You'd get +1 if your attribute was 5-9 and +2 if 10-14, or a whopping +3 if you were lucky enough to be a rare 15, and of course, nothing if 1-4.

So it would be possible if you had no skill, but a 10-14 attribute, you could pull it off as well as someone who was a skill 2, but a 1-4 in the key attribute. Maybe a bit of a stretch, but it made having an attribute 10+ something to rave about.

But generally characters would be a skill 1 or 2, and an attribute +1, so they'd have a +2 to +3 on the roll. So the roll for a routine task to succeed became a 4+ or a 5+. Fairly easy, but still tough enough that there'd be some suspense.

And of course with difficult at 11+, then the roll would become 8+ or 9+ ... enough to make 'em really sweat!

But if you were one of those rare individuals with a +2 attribute and a skill of 3 or 4 in something, then when a task came along that fit your abilities, then it became a piece of cake for a difficult task! The roll became a 6+ or even 5+ for difficult, practically routine for you!

So it wasn't perfect, but it was easy to understand and simple enough you could make up tasks on the fly. By giving names to the rolls, like Routine for 7+, then non rules oriented gamers or newbies could relate to it quickly.

And then making the rule generally to pick one skill and one attribute, you could make 'em up on the fly really quickly.

I also might mention it became pretty obvious when we started doing equipment sheets that adding some tasks to the sheets would be helpful.

What led you to develop the task system, used by late CT and, later, MT?

As I mentioned, my gaming background was first as a wargammer, so it always used to irk me there was no standardized way in Traveller for making use of all those cool attributes and skills.

So I invented the Universal Task Profile. True to the way my rule design tends to go, it started out simple, then got more complicated and bulky, then more streamlined again.

But it endures as one of DGP's better contributions to Traveller, so thanks!

What was your Big Plan for the Traveller line? [Primordials]

I said earlier:

" At any rate, we had some interesting stuff planned for the Alien books, especially Zhodani and Droyne, which was to be our next release. I'll divulge some secret stuff that links Knightfall, the Referee's Kit, and the next Alien book ... curious yet?"

I might also add the World Builder's Handbook to this list ...

What is the common thread to all 4 of these products? Once Zhodani and Droyne came out, we were going to reveal that common thread ... the primordials.

One misunderstanding about the primordials that I was somewhat remiss in not setting straight early on, is that the primordials are not "more advanced" than the ancients. They simply came before Grandfather and the Ancients, and he got some of his technology from them. They were more advanced in some areas, and woefully short of the ancients in many others.

This would have come out in time.

One area where the primordials were not more advanced is they were not essentially "immortal" like grandfather. But they do still exist as a race somewhere in the galaxy. There are a few specimens left in charted space (grandfather did not know this), but the bulk of the race has migrated off to the galactic core.

Their biggest asset as a race is that as a mature being, they are extremely psionic ... so much so that their abilities gives them a sort of "collective race mind" for acting. Now this was before the Borg on Star Trek, and the primordials are not malevolent like the borg.

Their biggest racial behavioral attribute is they are *extremely* curious. But this also means they can get so involved in the latest "group think" project that the race is absent minded to a fault.

Grandfather discovered evidence of this race (there are two primordial sites in the Imperium ... one is given in Knightfall, the other (never mentioned) is underground on the world in the folio adventure from the Referee's Kit. Grandfather discovered three more primordial sites in what is now Vargr space.

Grandfather concluded the primordials as a race migrated toward the galactic core, but he was never able to find them.

So Grandfather decided to take the most psionic race in charted space and make them his "errand boys" to find the primordials for him. So he planted an artifact in Zhodani space that shows different possible routes the primordials may have taken to the galactic core in hopes the Zhodani would one day explore all those routes and find the primordials for him.

Every so often, Grandfather checks up on the Zhodani to see how they are progressing on their errand.

We were going to have the Zhodani finally encounter the primordials ... the sparklers as they would call them because they use psionics to build a jump field instead of technology, which causes a sparkeling effect.

If you want to get technical, this makes the primordials not a major race, since they don't have any jump technology. You can't, for example, steal their jump technology because there isn't anything to steal. There isn't any jump drive in their ships. That really messes up the whole minor / major race way worse than the Aslan revelation!

We had expected the first encounter between the Zhodani and the primordials would be misunderstood by the Zhodani because the primordials would start doing intrusive psionic probes and the Zho's would mistake that as aggression and attack.

Because of the intense curiosity / absent mindedness angle of the primordials, a non-psionic Imperial (deadhead) could sneak aboard one of their ships right under their noses and they wouldn't pay any attention.

Again, remember this was all before the borg on Star Trek. There must have been something in the SF ether going around because there are some basic similarities between the primordials and the borg. Only thing is, any apparent evil intent on the part of the "sparklers" is simply because of their intense curiosity / absentmindedness attributes.

The primordial's home world is a high gravity one, so a lot of their activities relied on psionic mind manipulation rather than direct physical manipulation. However, when immature, a primordial has no psionic ability, that only comes with maturity.

Physically, an immature primordial is a low, squat crocodile looking creature ... they are described in the ref's kit folio adventure as a local life form! However, these creatures in the folio adventure never mature because the gravity on that world is too low!

The primordials absent mindedly left some of their young behind on that world, heading off toward the next system which had something very curious going on!

As they mature, the primordials go through a metamorphosis like a caterpillar / butterfly, and a mature primordial is a lizard-like creature that lives in a spiral mollusk-like shell. They usually anchor themselves to the walls of their ship like huge barnacles, and then manipulate things psionically. After the change into this mollusk form is when they get their psionic abilities and must be trained.

The cover of World Builder's Handbook is the same world that's in the folio adventure of the Ref's kit.

So that's how it all ties together. We had some fun times cooking all this up ... I have shared it with a few people over the years, including Roger Sanger. So now, the "world" knows!

Is the Primordial concept "canon"?

Did MWM authorise the primordials story arc? Can they be considered "canonical"?

Yes, Marc at the time was fine with it. They published Knightfall, which introduced the primordials.

And the Zhodani artifact that shows routes to the core is in the original Zhodani alien module.

The groundwork was laid, and we discussed what we wanted to do with the primordials in the Zhodani & Droyne alien book.

But that was before the DGP products were declared to no longer be canon, so who knows now.

Why did DGP and GDW think the Alien Incursions could occur and could be as successful as they were?

[One commentator has likened the Alien Incursions to a successful invasion of the US east coast by European fishing patrol fleets while the USN is busy elsewhere.]

It's actually more akin to 50% of all the nations on earth suddenly showing up on the borders of Canada and Mexico and then marching across. Set this in the mid 1800s ...

And have many of our troops busy in central Asia ... that's a close analogy, although still not perfect.

The Imperium does not have enough troops to defend all its borders all at once. Many of the races outside the Imperium decided to move quickly once they got the news (which still took time to reach everyone ... hence the mid 1800s analogy ... it could be months before our troops in central Asia even knew we had a problem back home).

Similar thing here. Plus it makes for more adventure, and that never hurts an adventure game.

Of course, the Aslan are basically land squatters at heart, and the Vargr always like an excuse for a good scrap. Mess up the Imperial chain of command and set it into disarray and it's likely all you will have to face for a while is the local system forces. Once the Imperials sort things out, there's a good chance you could be entrenched and be able to defend your position.

And so it goes ...

Was DGP's *Grand Tour* someone's campaign?

The Grand Tour had a feel that many of the adventures were part of a larger campaign. Was this a campaign that you or Gary ran? If so, were there adventures that you would liked to see published but didn't make the cut? Could you elaborate on any details that you might remember?

Well, I did run some Traveller campaigns prior to the DGP days, but the grand tour was planned in advance as to the route and the biggies like the visits to Vland, Capitol, Earth, and Aslan space, and the great "revelation" about the Aslan.

Beyond that, everything else just came out as we went along. We did playtest all the adventures with the same basic players throughout the tour, which was fun.

I referee'd most of them, but Gary did some too.

We planned things 1 or two adventures in advance. I don't recall any adventure ideas for the tour that we didn't end up using eventually.

The Rebellion came up just before we hit Capitol and was largely Marc's idea. We just got to implement it (which was a real tip of the hat to us at the time ...).

I was always partial to the Keith brothers adventures. I thought they could weave a good yarn, and was thrilled to get to print the Lords of Thunder adventure by Bill Keith in our last Traveller release, MTJ4.

Were there plans for a SOM sequel?

Starship Operator's Manual is a fan favorite. Were there plans for more releases? Are there spare copies of DGP materials out there?

I want to take these next questions as a unit since they are basically the same question - what about unreleased material, plans for releases or spare copies of product?

As to Starship Operator's manual, at the last minute we added "vol 1" with the idea that we could do more ships in future volumes.

But the problem was, we could keep coming up with more ideas for product than we had time and energy to execute them (hint ... offer to write for the current Traveller licensees, and then follow through with your threat, they will love you for it if your writing is any good)

The projects that had any substantial remains, you are aware of: Onesium Quest, Zhodani & Droyne are about it. And the substance was not that great, although we did some playtesting on the Zhodanis' to get a better feel for how they worked.

What fun playing the Zhos were if you understand their race's basic rationale. The psionics are a tool, and not to be abused. In fact, it's considered very bad taste to show off psionic ability in public.

Add to all this the need to be "ethical" and minimize the use of psionics and it generated some really interesting player debates in the adventures we ran.

And the more clever you can be to not make it look like you are using psionic means, the better. For example, you could cheat and read the other guy's mind in a negotiation. But reading anything but surface thoughts can be detected by the other guy often times, so you have to be really careful about it. Or planting a thought in the other guy's head.

Even using clairvoyance to see what is going to happen before it does can leave a "psionic signature" were those in the event get the feeling they are being "watched".

The point is, we felt you should make psionics risky business, especially in the presence of another person with psionic ability.

This creates a flood of ideas for uncertain tasks and such ... will you be found out? Or are you going to take the chance?

Then there's the whole issue of an undercover Zho in Imperial space, or the Zhos sneaking around at an interstellar conference and trying to be coy about it.

And don't forget the proles in Zho culture are the "deadheaded" ones for the most part. But horrors if you offend a prole by being openly psionic in his presence. Lots of subtrifuge and great fun in an aventure setting.

Can you teleport in, find the info you want, and teleport out without being discovered? Can you use clairvoyance to spy on a secret meeting without them knowing you were "there" psionically?

One of the keys I used was to tell the players it might work if they made it short and sweet. "Get in and get out" as fast as possible.

Then the debates would start over "when" ... like how long do you let the secret meeting go on before you attempt to do clairvoyance on it? And how long is "safe?" And so it went.

Anything you can do in a game to highten the tension and suspense always increases the fun and running the Zhos this way with their "ethics" made for some memorable game sessions!

As to a stack of product still sitting around somewhere waiting to be sold ... sorry. As I have said, the really popular stuff sold out.

Generally speaking, source books and rules addendums do better than adventure modules. The Alien series was a hot seller for us, but the last adventure we did, Flaming Eye, was a poor seller for us.

So it's not surprising things like Onesium Quest never saw the light of day. In today's market, making such products a PDF is ideal. Low overhead, and direct sales income rather than going through the distribution channel and making less than half the cover price.

Much of what was in production I spilled in MTJ4. If you have a copy of that product, then you know what I mean.

And in the final days, we were focusing most of our energies on AI. Roger got that too ... which is one thing I probably should have kept back from him. I thought he ought to produce it, but then he was enamored with some game he and his buddies were designing. Seems like everyone dreams of being a game designer.

Maybe after your first million words make it into print you will have proven you have the elbow grease necessary to design a game and really produce it. Talk's cheap, as they say.

What happened in Varian's apartment?

What happened in Varian's apartment with Lucan, Windhook, Varian and whatshername?

To be honest with you, the Rebellion was primarily GDW's and Marc's baby, we just got the honor to spill the beans first and to be the writers of the next edition of the rules.

Don't get me wrong, that was a great honor! And we did kick around ideas for the Rebellion, but Marc seemed to really get a kick out of all the "here's the story, and here's the *real* story" intrugue.

All the characters and names and basic motivations were Marc's. We certainly had input, and cooked up a few schemes ourselves, but 80% of the plays and counter-plays were GDW, even if we reported it first.

Like many fans, we often just listened to Marc tell us his latest thoughts, and then we would ask questions, pick it apart, and so on. The end result of those fun discussions was always better stuff.

What really happened in Varian's apartment? I know this isn't what you wanted to hear, but you got me. Marc can probably give you an answer, but I just don't recall.

Oh we did discuss what we really thought should happen, but that may not be what the official GDW stance was. I know we wanted the Real Strephon to be the real deal, which he eventually turned out to be in the official timeline.

What would have come after the Sparkler war in Deneb/Zhodani relations?

I had always figured some Imperial Mercenaries would end up helping the Zhos, and in the end, the Zhos would (at least for several decades) be on the best terms with the Deneb Domain that they had ever been.

More cooperation than ever, less sneaking around. This would make Zhodani psionics even more dangerous to use in Imperial space because if they were discovered, the Imperials would quickly get suspicious again and it would harm the Zho's current great relations.

Sort of akin to what might happen on Star Trek for being found in violation of the Neutral Zone. Bad Ju-Ju.

So this would all act to make playing Zhodani in Imperial space even more suspenseful and risky if you opted to use psionics. Get discovered by the Imperials and when word got back to the Consulate officials you were in deep doo-doo. Maybe some sessions with the Thought Police you would never remember.

Heh, heh.

Were there plans for the Solomani?

Given the Solomani were becoming the big empire, did DGP plan to do anything with the Solomani Confederation? Was the later hint that the Sols were moving towards a pan-sophontist line under Joshua Dahvin a DGP or GDW idea?

The fact [that] we put Solomani and Aslan in print near the end means you got most of what was on our minds about those two races before we folded.

Gee, this is terrible, but it's been 16 years so I guess I have an excuse.

Where did the Joshua Dahvin stuff first appear in print?

Was it in TD13, the earth issue? Or some place else?

I know Gary was a big fan of stirring the pot around the Solomani. He was personally very tickled with the new freedom the Solomani got with the Rebellion and really relished the fact the Aslan got jump technology from the Solomani ... proof the Aslan were a "trumped up minor race".

Now Gary didn't really see the Aslan as a minor race no matter where they got jump technology from, but he loves controversy and stirring up barroom fights and things like that in an RPG setting. So at least it set the stage for some really good barroom insults, and that was the part he enjoyed.

As far as our specific plans for the Solomani, we did not really have any. Most of our focus was coreward, in the Marches, and in Antares (Onnesium Quest).

What of the K'Kree?

What of the K'Kree? Lords of Thunder was a DGP purchase - would you like to have expanded on it? Or was a one-time venture?

MTJ4 was our final grand finale Traveller product, and William H Keith had this K'kree adventure gathering dust that he had never been able to sell to GDW.

I was tickled to get my hands on the adventure, being a big Classic Traveller Keith Adventure fan ... the Sky Raiders Trilogy being a personal favorite I have ref'd numerous times for several different groups of players.

I also saw Traveller, IMO, being driven into the ground by GDW with the coming of TNE. Frankly, the Rebellion was done a bit too heavy handed for my taste, with GDW calling most of the shots there too.

We did get to spill a lot of the beans, which was an honor I don't want to ever diminish, and we tried to make the best of things. I think we did pretty good, but I personally would have made the breakup slower and more splintered, with threats and counter-threats.

Lots more "fog" because of the long distances from one edge of the realm to the other, and I'd have made the aliens slower to move, and the Vargr incursions more pockets of incursion with lots of ebb and flow (and where are the borders *this week* ???)

This whole time period in our support of Traveller is what birthed the first serious discussions of doing our own game, because we did not own Traveller. As we slowly became more dissatisfied with the direction the game was going, and the diminishing influence of Marc on the game, we were losing heart.

Marc seemed to be a very stabilizing influence on the game, and I felt he was getting pressure from Frank and others in GDW to take the game directions he may not have 100% agreed with. There was a certain rationale that made sense to what they did, since it is true that turmoil makes for more adventuring options.

But I think there was too many "convenient" coincidences for my taste and some rather heavy handed or overly simplistic "history making" to the official canon going on at GDW that wasn't really in keeping with the original spirit of Classic Traveller.

From what I gather in reading some of the stuff out on the internet about how the fans feel, I'm not alone in this assessment of the Rebellion and TNE. From the sounds of things, though, the game's made a turnaround for the better since then with T4 and T20, and now with T5 discussions going on.

I think now that Marc isn't shackled by loyalty to GDW and can listen and act according to his heart-of-hearts, that's a great improvement. And he listens to what the fans tell him (I know Marc pays serious attention to fan feedback ...), so the future for the game is once again bright!

That's a long-winded way of saying, no, nothing was planned beyond Lords of Thunder with Gateway or the K'kree. It was to be our grand finale, and that was that.

What of the Onnesium Quest?

Can we have an outline of the Onnesium Quest adventures (or is it one of those copyright things) or if you remember what were going to be some of the fun and different things covered in that campaign?

Okay, now remember it's been 10 years so my brain is fuzzy on the details.

I do recall having the players find a lost starship loaded to the gills with onnesium. Enough to make the group the richest people in the Sector.

And being followed ... *ouch*

And finding a scientist who could take all this onnesium and help the players retrofit their ship with a TL16 jump drive for cheap (since they already have all the onnesium they could use).

And sloughing around the ship for clues that leads them on a quest to figure out where in the heck they got all that onnesium ...

... which leads the group ultimately outside the Imperial borders of the Antares sector into scattered worlds that can only be reached by jump-6 vessels ... and ultimately the source of all that onnesium ... an intensely dense, hollow asteroid in an inner asteroid belt.

It's the "homeworld" of a TL16 minor human race that has long since died off. The group will likely end up triggering the same defense mechanism that affected the other derelict ship they found.

As they are maneuvering away from the asteroid belt to prepare for jump, when they near the 100 diameter jump point, the asteroid, still locked on to them, will fire some sort of ray that causes their jump drive to do a premature energy dump to the jump grid, and they will misjump.

If they are lucky, they'll end up on the edge of some system with a gas giant or a population, and they will be able to get back to civilization after a few weeks of maneuver drive travel.

Or they will end up in deep space, and have to put some folks in low berth, kick in the maneuver drives, put the ship on power conserve, and hope for the best in a decade or two.

Of course, with their hold jammed with Onnesium, it makes it very easy for sensors to pick out their ship, since they will have an unusually high mass reading for their size.

Which is how the original inhabitants of the asteroid would deal with thieves.

But let's not forget they were being "followed".

Their "tail" could end up being the ones trying to escape with all the onnesium (it's what was left, so there is no more for the players) if they showed up and got the upper hand on the group.

And then their "tail" would be the ones who would misjump ... (but how would the players know that? Only eventually, once they found out their "buddies" never showed up to dump onnesium on the market.)

Can anyone say, "Let's look for another lost ship full of onnesium?"

What about Hivers?

Were there any plans for future Hiver involvement in the MT/rebellion and how different are TNE/GT Hivers from how DGP would have developed them?

Sorry, haven't followed TNE or GT *at all*, so I can't answer. Once DGP shut it's doors, I didn't keep up on Traveller since I expected it to not last in any form I would be interested in.

Glad to see I was wrong.

DGP never discussed the Hivers much, except in TD adventure 8. So other than what we did with them there, that was it. We only discussed Zhodani and Droyne since that was to be our next Alien module.

What was your take on Virus and TNE?

Did you and DGP have an ending in mind when they began the Rebellion? If so, what was it? If not, why not?

Not really, since the whole idea is the first place was mostly GDW's. Certainly not the TNE solution.

The whole TNE virus thing was for me, way over the top. I mean c'mon, computer viruses exist here at tech 8, so what's the big deal?

If a tech society can't build a higher tech computer to be "virus resistant" then who would want to trust technology at all? Sort of like the way the transporters kept failing every other episode of the original Star Trek tv series.

Who would want to use the dang thing if it was so unreliable? If you recall from Book 8 robots, we stipulated that computer memory became more resistant to outside influences with tech level. For example, you could kill the power to the computer and when the power was restored, the memory would be completely intact and the computer would pick right up where it left off.

More and more sophisticated error and tampering checking with tech level. Which makes writing effective viruses tougher with tech level.

If you wanted to destroy civilization, use something more insidious that you can shoot at. (grin)

The Borg on Star Trek were pretty good in that way. Darn nasty and hard to stop. If I wanted to destroy civilization, I would have some external outfit show up on the scene with some halfway plausible malicious intent, and release some really awful nanotechnology disease or something.

To make it more sinister, make it so you never see their faces, so you don't know just quite who or what you are fighting. Just their horrible ships that show up in your system, and a few weeks later, it's all over.

But then, I was never a fan of destroying the Classic Traveller setting in the first place, so DGP's preference would have been to figure out some way to get everyone to patch up their differences, move the borders around a bit, and then we can get back to finding the next ancients site or some other cool lost society's artifacts or aliens.

Regardless of what Virus was, the notion of destroying all the tech in charted space is again a rather heavy-handed thing to do, and seems just too convenient.

It's also against the spirit of Classic Traveller. Create this cool place to adventure, where the players can "get used" to how things work, then just tear it all down so anything goes and nobody can count on anything.

Felt sort of like getting all this great understanding of Star Fleet, the Federation, etc in Star Trek, and then let's destroy it all 3/4's of the way through the season so nothing's true any more. Now the writers who want to do non-Star Trek story lines can produce their stuff!

I had to wonder why all this careful work had been put into developing the Third Imperium only to totally trash it. Felt like killing off Luke Skywalker in Star Wars.

If you remember, the main reason I started DGP was to get to know the background so well it became second nature to me to adventure in it.

Now they wanted to trash it all in TNE, which completely destroyed my whole reason for doing DGP in the first place. Time to exit Traveller licensee stage left, which is what I did.

Seemed like RPG genocide to me. What better way to kill your game than to build up a following with one background, then destroy that background?

Could backfire and come off as a betrayal to your following.

Sure, there might be the "loyal at any cost" crowd, and the new blood attracted to the different background. But I bet those represent the fringes. Your core following will probably see it as betrayal and leave the game entirely.

I know I did.

Permit me one more brief observation about TNE, then I promise I'll move on.

My bet is those who most favor TNE got into Traveller about that time, so that's the game **they** fell in love with.

What one thing would you change in DGP's body of work?

That's an easy one ... I'd rewrite several of our TD feature adventures. They were experiments to push the envelope of what a good Traveller adventure could be (more than bar room brawls, rumors, and hauling cargo) and although they may have made good fiction stories, some of them just never worked out all that well in their execution.

Some of the plots were rather contrived, and others real yawners (TD2 comes to mind). [Which nevertheless was a favorite for some groups -rje]

One thing that these adventures depended on, rather than lots of action and shoot-em-up, was a focus on really **role-playing**.

Consistent with the discussion we've just had on what is popular with the age 15-30 gaming crowd, it's more the anti-thesis to what we used to call the "hack and slash" mentality. At DGP, we wanted adventures with less violence and more good old yarn play-acting.

However, I bet your typical Traveller (or any genre, including D&D) game doesn't have a lot of people staying in character around the table for 80-90% of the session.

Thanks to Gary, who was a big advocate of this sort of play, he taught this ol' wargammer that it wasn't all imagination, mechanics, and a fast pace, but impromptu character interaction. And that's how we did our games, which in my opinion took them off the scale in fun-factor.

Trying to do impromptu role playing puts you on the spot if you've never done it, but once you get over the awkwardness of trying it out, it gets to be **really fun**.

My guess is the average role player gamer doesn't do this much? And I suspect most Traveller GMs are game mechanics oriented rather than "role playing ambiance" oriented. Just seems to go with the Traveller mind set more.

Anyhow, that's what I would redo ... some of our weaker TD adventures. TD1, TD3, TD8, and TD17 stand out in my mind as the best of the lot. I don't recall specifically the weakest ones other than TD2 (I wrote it, so I remember it best), the rest are somewhere in between.

What do you think of GURPS' alternate time line for Traveller?

What do you think of GURPS Traveller alternate time line? (whereby, Stephon Lives and Dulinor Dies) For that matter, what does you think of GURPS Traveller itself?

I'm probably not a good person to ask this question of since I've never looked at GURPS nor have I ever looked at GURPS Traveller.

It does sound like, however, that the alternate timeline follows my heart-of-hearts and sticks with the Classic Traveller setting. But that's the gamer speaking.

If I was to put on my old DGP game manufacturer hat, I would have to agree with comments made on here earlier that the Third Imperium setting is kind of limited if you want "anything goes" sorts of action. For that reason, the Rebellion makes sense, or even the Virus of TNE.

Having said that, personally, had I been calling the shots with these options, I would have handled them more gingerly and not made them so much of a sledge hammer.

The Third Imperium setting always felt very real, and the timeline became more of a caricature with the Rebellion (felt more unreal) and that unrealness really went into overdrive with Virus.

I really don't want to start any more Rebellion or TNE bashing threads with my comments, but it is interesting to me that Traveller has remained a niche game or an "old kodger" game to a large degree.

Playing a "regular Joe" which is what many characters are in Traveller always furthered the realism to me, and we often talked about that at DGP.

Most people role-play to vicariously see what it would be like to be something they are not. Me, I role play to be *somewhere fun* that I'm not. I could just be me and have a blast in the setting if it was fun enough.

Perhaps that's the difference here. Maybe many Traveller fans like the "somewhere" angle over the "someone" angle? As long as Traveller maintains that emphasis, it's probably destined to never gain significant market share. If I take my DGP marketing hat off, the gamer in me doesn't care, and I would probably be a big fan of GURPS Traveller today if I were still a Traveller gamer.

But from the sounds of it, the vast majority of the RPG market likes the "someone" angle over the "somewhere" angle. Otherwise, once you seen one dungeon crawl, you've seen them all. They're just not *that much* different unless you have a clever Dungeon Master.

As an interesting side note, Steve Jackson himself approached Gary and me shortly after GURPS was released to see if we wanted to write a GURPS Traveller line. We said no, since we had all the work we could handle as it was, and it would be work for hire rather than sales income.

Had we said yes, it's interesting to wonder how things might have turned out different. I know I would have been sorely tempted to do just what Loren has done, and maintain the Classic Traveller timeline in that version of the game.

For us old codger Traveller fans (speaking as a gamer now), I prefer the somewhere fun angle of the CT Third Imperium. To make it all more real, then I need to be more of a regular Joe (no pun intended) in that somewhere fun place. And that somewhere fun place can't be too dangerous or it will ruin things if I get creamed. That's why a stable Third Imperium appeals to me, I think.

Sticking with CT probably doesn't do much to increase Traveller's market share appeal, but it would sell this loyal fan products, to be sure.

What would a DGP Traveller line for SJG have looked like?

You know, I'm not really sure. We never gave it much thought given we were so busy with what we had planned.

I would like to think we would have stuck with the CT timeline as an alternative background. I also think we might have pressed into more character development type adventures ... but I'm not sure just what we would have done.

It's easy to say, in hindsight what perhaps I would like to have seen us do, but whether or not we would have done them ... well, what we *did* do is not even touch GURPS at all.

In hindsight from a business perspective, that may have been a mistake. But had we done that, you can figure the number of products that came out from DGP directly would have been fewer.

Traveller gamers might have seen that as a betrayal. And the other wrinkle is I'm not sure Marc would have given his permission to SJG (the competition) to do GURPS Traveller, either. That was well before GDW started to hit the skids, so it's an awful lot of "what if'ing".

Reality is, that's not what happened although it sounds like GURPS Traveller is closer to the game I like to play as a Traveller gamer than MegaTraveller or TNE. T20 looks pretty cool too, and I'd like to learn more about it as well. As does T5 ...

Kind of ironic, isn't it, since I did most of the MegaTraveller rules rewrite. Well, that was following GDW's desires mostly, and wearing my DGP marketing hat, not just being the Traveller gamer I wanted to be in my heart-of-hearts.

What was the reasoning behind the whole 'Aslan are not really a major race' thing?

I see this as a fun bit of back history mostly. It's something Marc had cooked up as a bit of irony.

I've always seen this as a lesson to us in how trying to come up with labels for the "haves" and the "have nots" needs to be tempered with fairness and good sense. And sometimes those labels are just plain wrong.

In fact, the Aslan are a major race. Period. The definition is a poor one. A major race is a race who has the moxy to parley the use of jump technology into a star-spanning empire. Who cares where they got the jump technology?

Do you see? The have/have not labeling is most often devised by the haves to further their agenda. And to be used to look down their noses at the have nots.

So here we are, the Solomani with a star spanning empire, and the Aslan with a star spanning empire. A Solomani and an Aslan meet in a bar. The Solomani brags that **his** ancestors painstakingly, with much sweat and tears, finally devised the first jump drive.

Then the Solomani looks at the Aslan with a sneer. He points at the Aslan and proclaims, "While this Aslan here, lying through his teeth, didn't shed one tear or one drop of sweat, stole jump drive technology from the Solomani -- and has the **gall** to claim his ancestors invented it on their own. The Aslan are nothing but a bunch of dirty lying thieves, with no honor."

Blah, blah, blah. Does all this talk and minor/major race definition maneuvering change the fact that both races have this massive star spanning empire? Nope.

But then Grandfather engineered humans into their various sub-races. Maybe that ought to make humans some sort of second-rate aliens?

The point is, it's always something. Somebody wants to define themselves into prominence and there's always a way to define another group into being second-rate.

I consider the sheer drive of the race is the kind of **drive** that makes a major or minor race. Not whether or not you invented jump drive on your own.

The prominence of the Aslan in known space speaks for itself. The definition be hanged. The Aslan are a major race, and nothing is going to change that, no matter what happened thousands of years ago in their distant past.

Did you have plans for the Droyne?

We did, but that was Gary's part of the next alien module, and the Zhodani were mine.

Gary was keeping his part close to the vest, saying it was going to be fun ... etc. "Wait till you see what I have planned for the Droyne" was his general comment.

So Gary would have to comment on that part, since he never shared it with me. I would not hold my breath though, because it's been 10 years and Gary tends to forget things easily.

I recall things we had discussed the year before and when I approached Gary again, he would not remember. It's easy come, easy go with Gary. He's brilliant and loaded with clever ideas all the time, but it's like his brain offloads extra baggage to make room for all the new ideas, so I don't expect he'll remember much after all these years.

But maybe we can get him on here and have him comment. It could be interesting, if he remembers any of it.

How much computer assistance did you guys use for Game-Support?

How much would you have been comfortable with? Computations and maps outside of play? Laptops? Tablets?

We used computer programs a lot for producing background, like generating worlds or designing vehicles.

I wrote a program that generated the sector data, of course. Then I went one step further and wrote a program that read the sector data and drew the maps. It was pretty cool ... all I had to do was go into the final PICT file that was produced and add the jump routes, and move a few things around and voila! Map all set ready to send to the photo typesetter (1200 dpi).

I also did a lot of spreadsheets that I used to design robots with for book 8, and later for MegaTraveller vehicle design.

But as to gaming assists, never did much of that.

My tendency with my rules design is always to move toward overly complex, and then hammer on it to distill it down to come up with something simpler and more streamlined.

One interesting example was a streamlined combat system I came up with using the UTP. Some of the most fun combat sessions we ran was with that system because things moved so fast.

But that system never made it into print because it was pretty half baked and needed lots more work to become robust.

Would have loved to have a laptop or a palm for gaming assistance. And being a computer guy by profession, I prefer the computer to pages and pages of rules, actually.

But Gary also taught us the importance of the play-acting element and if you make this a high priority in your game sessions, you will tend to ref your sessions a lot more by the seat of the pants as to what makes a good story instead of being a slave to the rule book anyway.

It's nice to have the computer available if you want to use it. Plus with the internet today, it would be fairly easy to build some web services and then run game sessions online with gamers anywhere in the world.

Now there's a thought ...

Why the strong coverage of linguistics for Gvegh and Trokh?

I've alluded to this before ... it was Gary. He could read or write at least 8 languages, including Sanskrit.

He was fascinated with the Vargr languages and played with them, trying to figure out what sounds a Vargr would have problems with in Anglic. So he developed a Vargr accent for Anglic, and used that whenever he role played a Vargr in one of our adventures.

It added a lot of ambiance to the session, and of course you can see how if you work to stay in character most of the session, this makes for some great fun.

Why was DGP so infamous for errata? Time crunch?

The short answer is we tried to do too much too fast.

MegaTraveller was especially this way for yet another reason. We did MegaTraveller all on our Macintoshes and GDW was still using pre-desktop publishing Compugraphic typesetting equipment.

That means everything we sent them had to be laborously retyped. That means many typos were introduced into the rules, especially into the tables and formulas.

Over the next couple of years, GDW converted to Desktop Publishing with Macs ... which would have made it possible for them to take our files and go with them directly.

Also, I had been so close to the vehicle design rules and we were under the gun by GDW to deliver to a tight deadline so we didn't have as much time as I would have preferred to debug them with playtesters.

This means the descriptions of how to do designs was not very well explained. Couple that with more than a few typos in formulas and tables and you end up with a confusing situation indeed.

That's why I was so eager to make errata available to correct for all these woes. And the rules are typical of my design style where they start out more complex than necessary at first, and get simplified as we playtest them.

But there wasn't really any playtesting done by anyone but me, which was a problem. I'm glad to see the examples on here by Aramis and others that change the process to make it easier.

That's the additional refinement I would have done had I had the time I wanted. I also agree with the notion that a streamlined system and a detailed system would have been better. Again, this all takes time.

I think a streamlined system could have been developed too, but it would have taken quite a bit more time, since I would need to play with the designs enough to find the patterns and develop reasonable shortcuts. Coming up with common subassemblies probably would have been one way to simplify things.

I used spreadsheets a lot to do the test designs. The nice thing about using elaborate spreadsheets is you can crank out many designs in a hurry, and really give the system a shakedown.

However, you also forget how complex it can be to do the designs by hand when you do that, so there's a downside to it too. I think that's a factor in the vehicle design rules.

Likewise, task based combat had too many rules, and needed to be streamlined, but we had to deliver to our promised deadline, so time didn't allow fully playtesting it like I wanted.

I also wanted to put a highly streamlined version of task-based combat in the rules, and I had playtested those somewhat, but they also had big gaps. The "fast combat" rules, as I called them, were a blast,

because combat went so quickly it added a lot to the excitement level. But they needed a lot more work to make them publishable.

Funny thing is, now after 10 years, I have forgotten almost all the rules to MT. When I drag out something and read it, my eyes cross. "This crap is sure complex", is my first thought!

These days, I want simple and elegant. If I was to do a game, I would want the computer to handle all the details, and I would just want to enjoy the game without having to get bogged down into rules minutiae.

Why use the "short displacement ton" (13.5kL) rather than 14kL? And why didn't armor take up volume?

As near as I can recall, a discussion with Stafford Greene of Seeker revealed his woes in trying to get ship plans to fit into the displacement given. He noted that many of the plans resulted in ships too big for the tonnage.

This is probably why I went with the slightly smaller displacement, and I also believe I considered armor to be external to the ship, and thus increased its external dimensions, rather than reducing its internal dimensions.

All in an attempt to make Stafford's job slightly easier when trying to get it all to fit. Yeh, the difference between 14 and 13.5 is only about 4%, but every little bit helps.

That's what I seem to remember, but it's been 10 years, so I could have had some other reason I've that has completely slipped my mind.

How did you get the art to work so well with your material?

You can credit the great artwork to Rob Caswell's art direction. We were never much for "just filling a hole" with some piece of art.

We almost never used filler art. Each piece was made to order, with Rob carefully directing the artist on what to draw. Rob would often write several paragraphs of art direction meticulously specifying what the piece needed to include, synchronized with the text.

And Rob would only use artists he knew could deliver the "look" he wanted.

I think it was that kind of attention to detail that helped make our products good enough that people really liked them and complimented us on our efforts.

Why not come back and do it again?

Since DGP products took the Traveller gaming world by storm when they were first introduced, rather than wonder what happened, why not pull a Steve Jobs, come back, and do it again?

[This answer also includes Q26, which is "Have you considered doing more work in the gaming industry?" -rje]

I find the wording "took the Traveller gaming world by storm" to be interesting. Our first product, TD1, only had a print run of 1000 copies and it took us over 6 months to sell them all.

That hardly qualifies as "taking the Traveller gaming world by storm". And we quickly found out most distributors are not gamers, they are business people, so they don't know a good gaming product from a bad one.

However, they can tell whether or not you know the distribution channel ropes, and if your product is small, black and white, and looks like it was printed on a dot matrix printer, they smell "wanna be" all over you and the product, and they are not a charity case. Most said "no" when we approached them with our first year's B&W Traveller's journals.

So we didn't take any market by storm ... it was a lot of persistent hard work and pouring any profits back into improving the "shelf appeal" of our products.

Now on to the second part ... why not come back and do it again, or write more for the gaming business.

Well, as I have mentioned, I pretty much burnt myself out on Traveller during the 10 years DGP was in operation, and haven't looked at anything published for the game since, nor have I even thought of running a session.

And that's still pretty much true. It's fun to speak with you all and catch up on the game, and if I was to come into some of the modern materials for the game at the right price, I might pick up some of the products just for an interesting read.

But as to writing for Traveller, I'm done. The 10 DGP years fully satisfied my curiosity about the background and the game. Plus I really am more interested these days in getting away from mounds of rules and having the computer do all the heavy lifting.

Which means I'm also not especially interested in rules design any more.

Having said all that, I am still interested in developing concepts for games, and have been kicking around a concept for a prehistoric game.

I'm intrigued by all the out of place artifacts and fossils that are found in the geological record. There are hundreds of such things that don't fit into the popular evolutionary time scale, and they are mostly being ignored, because they do not fit the theory ... they should not be there.

What kind of things? Very advanced metallic artifacts found all the way down to the cambrian layer, as well as fossil evidence of humans all the way to the cambrian as well.

Fossilized human foot prints, fossilized sandle prints, etc.

Now if there were less than a dozen such out-of-place finds, then perhaps they could be explained, but there are hundreds!

I'm not about to go off the deep end with this information, but it does make you wonder. And it makes a great foundation for a game of fantastic adventure in Earth's distant past.

Here's an excerpt from one of the books on this subject, "Hidden History of the Human Race".

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In The Hidden History of the Human Race [the authors push back] ... the horizons of our amnesia not just 12,000 or 20,000 years, but millions of years into the past, and showing that almost everything we have been taught to believe about the origins and evolution of our species rests on the shaky foundation of academic opinion, and on a highly selective sampling of research results.

The two authors then set about putting the record straight by showing all the other research results that have been edited out of the record during the past two centuries, not because there was anything wrong or bogus about the results themselves, but simply because they did not fit with prevailing academic opinion.

Anomalous and out-of-place discoveries reported by Cremo and Thompson in The Hidden History of the Human Race include convincing evidence that anatomically modern humans may have been present on the Earth not just for 100,000 years or less (the orthodox view), but for millions of years, and that metal objects of advanced design may have been in use at equally early periods.

Moreover, although sensational claims have been made before about out-of-place artifacts, they have never been supported by such overwhelming and utterly convincing documentation as Cremo and Thompson provide.

In the final analysis, it is the meticulous scholarship of the authors, and the cumulative weight of the facts presented in The Hidden History of the Human Race, that really convince. The book is, I believe, in harmony with the mood of the public at large in the world today, a mood which no longer unquestioningly accepts the pronouncements of established authorities, and is willing to listen with an open mind to heretics who make their case reasonably and rationally.

Never before has the case for a complete re-evaluation of the human story been made more reasonably and rationally than it is in these pages.

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Kind of gives you goose bumps, doesn't it? It's an "underground" movement in the geologic scientific community, and it could be fun to speculate about.

Think of it: Humans with metallic artifacts of advanced design living on the earth during the time of the dinosaurs! Done properly, what an interesting adventure setting that could make!

So that's my latest "gaming" idea, such as it is. We'll see if it turns into anything ...

Do you think A.I. would have been like Transhuman space?

AI was an interesting game concept. One of the things we had fun with in playtesting was that some of the players' equipment was NPCs, since it was intelligent.

To use AI's terms, the stuff had "wit".

Or one player could be the other player's equipment. Stuff like that. Pretty interesting ...

[As far as being like Transhuman space] Well, I can see a few similarities ... but on the surface, AI would feel more like a pure old fantasy RPG since the population for the most part considers what techy stuff there is to be magic.

They grow tools from "seeds". Most travel is on foot. Only the adepts (high priests) of most local citidels have powered transport.

If your tool loses its wit, then you take it to an adept to have its wit restored, for a price. If you get caught in a crime, you may get a disease, which will cause you to turn to ashes overnight (disassembler nannies).

How developed was A.I. in terms of written manuscript?

One draft adventure module existed, called the Phantom Orb or something like that.

And outline of character generation rules existed, along with a character stats sheet and some sample characters.

A draft write up of the background was in place. There were rules on how nannies worked and some of the intelligent equipment.

A rough map of the earth 1500 years from now had been done.

We had about 12 pieces of full color concept art that had been done, along with another two dozen or so b&w pieces.

Roughly half way done for a "lite" rules set. Perhaps 25% of the way done for a full-blown rules set.

One concept we were playing with for presenting adventures is what we called the "cinematic nugget". In effect, it was a page with an illustration and a "presentation" write up for the players, and then ref's notes on all the behind the scenes skinny for the nugget. The idea was to get each nugget to fit on a page if possible. And each nugget was to have an illustration to show the players to fuel their imagination.

Because of nannies, characters could conceivably live a very long time (at least 200 years) and we even had some rumors of "wizards" in the wilds that legend said were as much as 800 years old.

How close did A.I. come to publication, and will it ever see print?

Roger Sanger now owns the rights to AI, and unless he makes a radical departure from his former ways, I don't expect AI will ever see print.

The game was 1/3 to 1/2 done. Rough character generation rules existed, as did task rules, equipment rules, and a fair amount of background narrative. One folio adventure existed and was being sent to playtesters.

But I wouldn't hold my breath. Even if Roger does get around to publishing AI, I doubt it will be the game I designed.

Could the concepts around A.I. still be developed as a game?

Yes, I believe the basic ideas could be taken and redeveloped into another game with a different name. And you could change some of the details.

All perfectly legal, especially since it doesn't look like Roger is out anything with AI.

However, this is primarily supposed to be a MegaTraveller thread, so it's probably time to pull it back to that topic.

If you want to discuss this any further, contact me privately.

Where did DGP get its sector maps?

With regards to the DGP books that contained sector maps (I'm thinking specifically here of Solomani and Aslan), do you remember where DGP obtained the system locations from?

World locations came from Atlas of the Imperium. We got the actual files from GDW and then input them into a special program we wrote that would generate the UWP details for each hex with a system in it.

The Atlas of the Imperium had the location, gas giant, and some basics about the world (asteroid belt, etc.) but most of the UWP was missing.

Our program filled in the details and produced a text file, minus the world name. Then we went through and named all the worlds, and then ran the file into our sector drawing program.

The result was a sector map with world names, minus any borders or jump routes. We just added the borders and jump routes, then ran the map out to the typesetter at 1200 DPI.

In some cases (like the Vargr extents), there were no world position maps. We just generated the UWPs, and then ran them into another program we had that drew sector dot maps using the world position to know where to draw the dot.

Because I felt you could go overboard in detailing every inch of the official Traveller universe leaving ref's no wiggle room for their own imagination, we destroyed most of those UWP source files, because beyond the world location, we wanted to leave it up to you to flesh things out.

How did Roger Sanger get the rights to DGP material?

[This question is merged with Q29. -rje]

Ah, Roger Sanger.

Gary and I started DGP as equal partners, and then as it became apparent the company wasn't going to make anyone rich years later, I bought out Gary's half at 200% of his initial investment.

So by the time Roger showed up, I was sole owner of DGP. I did consult with Gary for his advice, but the decision to sell or not sell DGP was totally mine at that point.

So how'd it happen?

I closed DGP's doors in 1993, since the gaming business was getting soft, computer games and the internet was on the rise, and I was just plain getting burnt out. I was making lots of money as a computer consultant and had all the work I wanted.

Meanwhile, my kids were in their teen years and not seeing much of dad (yes, there were some serious problems because of this) and my wife was growing less patient with the fact she never saw me because I was always working on the latest "deadline".

AI was underway, but with the gaming business possibly going down for who-knows-how-long, I wasn't sure it would ever recover.

And I saw a disturbing trend in science-fiction gaming ... more of a trend to gritty, violent game settings, and the worst of all -- a marrying of science fiction with the horror genre.

I'm a space opera guy, preferring more the star-spanning adventure, seeing new places, making discoveries, and enjoying interactions with aliens and strange cultures.

So anyhow, I decided it was time to "get a life" again so I shut down DGP.

Now I had a basement full of product (TD19, 20, 21, MTJ3, 4) since the print runs had been pretty sizeable on those products but the downturn in the gaming market meant we couldn't sell them.

And I had a few half-done projects, both for some Traveller titles (Onnesium Quest, Zhodani & Droyne, mostly) and the partially complete AI game.

I figured one of these days I'd have to make a dump run with all the unsold Traveller stuff.

So a year went by, and I didn't touch Traveller or even look at it. I found out how nice it was to be a normal human again, and I liked it very much.

Discussions with my wife and kids revealed how terrible things had been with me "not available" and I grew to very much dislike what I had been. I also realized I was absolutely burned out on Traveller and gaming.

So then in late 1994, this Traveller fan shows up on my door step wanting to buy some DGP products.

When I showed him my basement, he about wet his pants. He wanted to know if he could buy several boxes of product, and he emptied out his pockets, handing me several hundred dollars.

Figuring all this stuff was unsellable, I told him I didn't think he would be able to sell it all, but he insisted. So I took his money. It was pennies on the dollar, but it was way more than I was making from the stash. I kept a few boxes of product just in case I would ever find a market for them.

He asked what the deal was with DGP and I told him. Then he asked the unthinkable, would I sell the DGP name to him?

I told him that would not be cheap and that we would have to draw up a legal contract. This started visits and discussions with Roger that took about 9 months to complete.

I also spoke with Marc about selling DGP and Marc, Roger, and I had several phone conversations about the Traveller line, licensing Roger to do Traveller, etc.

I was so tired of gaming that I sold Roger everything, just to get it out of my house. I even sold him most of my Traveller collection. I was so disgusted with myself at what I had done to my family that I really never wanted to repeat that mistake again.

Roger paid me with a check, and yes it cleared the bank. At the time his job consisted of repossessing real estate. I was impressed that someone with the gall to repossess real estate just might have the moxie to parley DGP back into existence again and carry on.

At any rate it was unlikely I would have any more suitors at my door wanting to buy DGP.

I'm still mildly interested in Traveller more out of curiosity about where the game has gone these days, than anything else. But I'm really not interested in playing or writing for the game any more. I truly burned myself out on the game, and my interests have moved elsewhere.

Ever since my college days, I have been interested in simulation. My fascination with role playing games is how they simulate another time and place. So I immersed myself into Traveller with DGP to get the best possible idea of how to properly simulate the Traveller universe.

Since then, I have returned to my first love, HO scale trains. Now I simulate in 3D with actual models. You can see more about my model trains on the web link below my signature. We're talking serious stuff here ... computer chips in them and the works.

Although those times were difficult for my family, my kids are all grown now and being in the real world trying to make ends meet has made them more understanding about that time.

And they are amazed and fascinated with what DGP accomplished, and they have fond memories of the group ... Gary, the Parkers, Rob and Deb.

So time has tempered things quite a bit and we all now can look back at what was accomplished and have some pride in it.

And with the internet, it's possible to discuss and share some of this history in a way that was more or less impossible 10 years ago.

So it's about time for some of this to be told, and for it to be shown that while it was tough at times, there was a happy ending!

My daughter, for example was actually helping ship out the orders for TD & MTJs over the last couple of weeks, and was reading some of the autographs and getting a big kick out of them.

And I also, am proud of what we accomplished. There aren't many people who can say that they have over a million words in print and that some of it has been translated into German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Japanese!

All thanks to Marc Miller and this wonderful game called Traveller.

Do you think the DGP products had too much detail?

In retrospect, do you think the DGP products might have covered the OTU in a bit too much detail - leaving less for the imagination?

Yes.

I think less detail probably would have been better. I think it would have been better to focus on a few star systems per adventure and detail them, and leave the Imperium star system positions, etc, somewhat more vague for the most part.

Provide a detailed sector once in a blue moon.

Personally, I think Traveller is designed backwards in this regard, a topic we often discussed at DGP.

Wargames are by nature, map oriented, and tend to be more sweeping in scale. Rarely do you see wargames that get down to hand-to-hand combat level. It's most often battalions or divisions, sometimes down to companies and platoons.

But role playing games are about individual characters and what matters to them. That's one big reason why fantasy gaming is so popular. Fantasy gaming doesn't focus on detailing half of the known universe. Just what matters to a few characters.

So Traveller was designed with this star-spanning map mentality, not character-centric. But that's all backwards. As a role-playing game, it should be designed from the character out. The farther you get from the character, the less detail you should be concerned with.

It's not surprising that Traveller would have this orientation, since GDW was first a wargaming design company, and a huge-scale wargaming design company at that. Look at their Europa game series. Massive in scale and scope.

While the wargammer in me really identifies with this orientation in Traveller, I don't think it is conducive to popular opinion in the RPG market and has somewhat "doomed" Traveller to remain a niche game.

And I'm not sure there's much you can do about this perception now. What's done is done. For a science-fiction role playing game to be more popular, it needs to be character-centric through and through, with rich world detail and an motivation that keeps you there for a while so you get to know it and it's people. The galaxy spanning star charts and constant system hopping part should remain very much in the background, because that's not role-playing, that's wargaming.

So Traveller is what Traveller is, and I think it would be real hard to re-invent a version that would appeal to a larger market. I'd love to be proven wrong, but I think the real answer would be to design a more character-centric SF game as AI was meant to be.

Or this new "Masters of Antiquity" game idea I mentioned, where intelligent beings show up on Earth during the Cretaceous, and forever alter the direction of prehistoric history ... seeding the earth with lifeforms genetically engineered to gain dominion over this planet ... warm-blooded ones to replace the cold-blooded ones. And that's only the beginning ...

Technology-wise, where did DGP start, progress, and end?

I've kind of touched on this already, but I thought it might be fun to take this question and talk generally about how we started (technology-wise), how we progressed, and where we ended up when our version of DGP shut down in 1993. For the record, I sold DGP to Roger Sanger in the spring of 1996.

When we started out, we used Mac 512Ks, MacWord, and MacPaint to produce our issues. We printed the pages out on an Epson printer, pasted them up full size (8.5 x 11) then photographically reduced them about 60% to fit in the halfsheet format.

My wife's career experience is in the print typesetting and pasteup field, so she pasted up all our products and did all the printer liaison work.

The first two issues were done this way. With issue #3, we moved to 300 dpi laser printing, but we still photographically reduced the issues to make them look better.

Somewhere in here (don't recall exactly when) we moved to ReadySetGo, which was a desktop publishing application. My wife helped with the use of this software, since this was her profession.

We went to a brief stint on MacPublisher, then went to PageMaker. We used Macs all along the way.

TD Issue 7 was the first issue with a hand-drawn art cover. Issue 9 was our first full-size issue with a color cover.

To use hand-drawn artwork or to put photographs in the magazine, we had to take them to a prepress outfit and they would make a positive photo screen for us. In all cases we had to measure the spot where the piece was to go and then specify to the prepress guy the percent reduction we needed.

Once all this stuff came back from the prepress guy, we would print out the text on a laser, and my wife would paste up all the graphics on the pages as tabloids (11 x 17", that is two pages each).

The pages were built so the proper page for that sheet was across from the other sheet so the printer could assemble the sheets and get a book that had the pages in order. In other words, for a 48 page book, page 1 would be opposite page 48, 2 opposite page 47 and so on.

The color cover was interesting how it was done.

First we would get the painting photographed on a 4x5 direct positive. Then we would take the photo and our cover pasteup (the text part) and give them to the prepress guy. He would build us a composite that included the artwork and the text, in color. We would get back 4 pieces of film ... one each for magenta, cyan, yellow, and black.

The cover stuff was easily the most expensive part of any product, both the artwork and the prepress work, and of course the four color printing was pricey too.

So that's how we did our products from a technological point of view.

Today, there's enough power that you can do all of this digitally without any physical pasteup. And you can target either print plates for a physical product, or you can target a pdf document for online distribution.

We operated DGP in the tail end of the transition from physical to digital, and shut down before the transition was complete. The one irony is we were often ahead of GDW in our use of state-of-the-art publication technology once we moved to full-size, full color cover products.

GDW had older technology that they had paid big bucks for and couldn't afford to just pitch it overnight. We, on the other hand, were much smaller and as a new outfit, we could get the best of what was available technically, and had no older stuff that we had to "use up".

That's the advantage of being small, it also means you are often more nimble than the bigger guys. But then, you also have to struggle more to meet payroll if you are smaller, so not everything is rosey if you are a startup outfit.

How do you feel about DGP being “forbidden canon”?

How do you feel about the thought that the MT copyright holder's (Marc W. Miller) decisions may result in that entire chapter of Traveller history being sort of papered over or ignored as 'Forbidden Canon', and that much of the work done there will end up being edited out, written over, or ignored?

I am understandably sad that DGP's work may end up being "thrown out" but I can see Marc's position. If Roger Sanger wants to be so hard-nosed about DGP's work, and wants money for it (anything more than a token fee is uncalled for in the gaming business), then Marc has little choice.

But by effectively forcing the original DGP's past work to be thrown in the dumpster, Roger isn't making any friends among the original DGP staff. Sadly, Roger will be largely responsible to burying DGP's work for good.

But on the other hand, I also think this gives Marc a lot of new freedom. One of the problems with constantly detailing the background like DGP did is you end up with this mountain of material that you need to stay consistent with, or come up with some excuse as to why what you thought was true wasn't really true after all.

It's tough to make those sorts of excuses not sound lame.

So it becomes easier to just carve off a part of the background from a certain source and declare it not so. Now the constraints have been removed and you don't have to worry about some fan writing in and telling you that page so and so of some DGP product said the opposite.

So I'm not sure how much Roger's hard-nosed position is responsible for Marc's stand on DGP materials these days. I know Marc always praised our work, so I suspect Roger's inflexibility plays a significant part in relegating our work to the dumpster.

How did you guys come up with the Battledress costs, weights, etc?

How did you guys come up with the Battledress costs, weights, etc? Was there a design sequence, or was it off the cuff?

To come up with the stats for higher tech stuff, we didn't do anything all that spectacular.

Depending on the item in question, we would try to make it lighter, more functional, better endurance etc. But we would also see if we could make it have some minor disadvantage too, like increased cost, greater power needs, harder to fix if it breaks, etc.

And then we would wing it. Life's too short to build a design rules set for *everything*.

What if you had bought the IP rights to Traveller?

In your farewell editorial in MTJ4, you mention that DGP inquired about buying the IP rights to Traveller from GDW. Had you been granted those rights would you have remained in the game publishing business longer (and do you think you might even have still been publishing games today?), or would the circumstances that led to DGP's closing have happened regardless?

I think this would have probably kept DGP in business longer, but I would likely have actively pursued selling the business and it would have made it a more attractive commodity with the Traveller rights themselves associated with it.

But alas, that was not to be, and were I in Marc's shoes, I would never have let go of those rights.

We can speculate all we want, but that's not what happened.

I truly burned myself out bigtime on Travller with all the extra hours I put into DGP so I don't think I could have kept going, for all the reasons previously discussed in my other answers.

I'm actually glad this *did not* happen now looking back, because my family would have suffered even more with me being essentially an absent father and husband.

Traveller's great, and I had a blast writing for it and seeing DGP get some measure of notariety for the quality of our efforts. But nothing's more important than family, so in the final analysis, I made the right choice.

What's your favorite CT adventure?

My all-time favorite is Twilight's peak. It wasn't very heavily illustrated, but what illustrations were there added a lot to the atmosphere of the adventure when reading it for the first time. And I love an archeological mystery.

I also love the Keith brothers' Sky Raider's series for the same reason.

The Traveller Adventure was a lot of fun to read through and as an adventure product it is an amazing work.

As to MT adventures, that's a lot tougher because by that time I was heavily into the production of product myself and less of a pure fan.

The adventure we printed in MTJ4, Lord's of Thunder, comes to mind. But that could be played as a CT adventure just as easily. Once again, the archeological aspect makes it lots of fun to read.

Of all the adventures listed, the ones I have played the most was the Sky Raiders series. I've run those adventures for at least two different groups.

I don't recall most of the NPC's names from the Sky Raider's series, but I do remember there was the female archeologist, a smart-alec son of an archeology professor this woman brought along (she felt obligated to do so out of respect for the guy's father), and this pain-in-the-rear guide they had.

I recall the smart-alec guy's name was Drew.

Anyhow, I was playing all three of these characters as NPCs, and play acting doing some actual role playing to the group.

I had this Drew character come and get right in the face of the guide late one evening in camp after the guide had been drinking.

I role played their exchange and then suddenly had the guide pull out his gun and shoot Drew stone dead. Everyone in camp heard the gunshot and the first one to reach Drew was the woman archeologist.

She checked him quickly to see he was dead, then she looked up at the guide in unbelief and said,

"He's dead! You animal! You KILLED him!" Then she ran off in tears.

I'll never forget the group's reaction. They were stunned.

"He shot Drew! He SHOT Drew!" The guide had been rather cranky but they never expected this!

It was great. None of these characters really existed, and I was playing them all. Yet it was apparently real enough for them that all three of these NPC's had personalities that they had come to know (or thought they knew) as distinct people.

That situation and the group's reaction stands out as one of my fondest memories as a Traveller ref.

Do you have an NPC sidekick story to share?

I created an NPC sidekick for the group. He was sort of a cross between MR-T and the incredible Hulk. He was this big brutish guy who was as onery and tenacious as a bull dog. But he was fiercely loyal to the group and would defend them at all costs.

He was also very lucky. I decided in any combat situations or dice rolls I would construe things to always be in GaaTae's favor. Most of the time.

(I called him gaw-tay, a play on my last name as it is sometimes mispronounced ... Few-gaw-tay. We keep it simple and just say Few-gait.)

Anyhow, GaaTae became a group favorite. They could always count on GaaTae to use brute force to somehow save the day.

Sometimes I would let things turn bad for GaaTae (knowing that I would turn the tide later in his favor, but they didn't know that) and everyone would be on the edge of their seat wondering what was going to happen to GaaTae.

Yes, also some fun memories, good ol' GaaTae.

[LKW] What made you choose the name "Trepida" for the Imperial Grav tank?

Loren:

Gary was always injecting language-related naming into things and the Trepida was one of them. There are several inside jokes in our work that are language-related and that's mostly Gary's doing. He even named some things in Sanskrit (transliterating the sounds), doing things like naming an ice planet "hot place" and the like.

Actually, the idea with the tank is what it instills in those who encounter it, so it's a "backwards boast" ...

"Yikes! Everybody head for the hills! Here come the Trepidias!"

Who owns the rights to DGP artwork?

Do you know who owns the rights to the cover paintings for the TDs? How about the WBH Cover Art Prints?

I own the original art for the World Builder's Handbook cover ... would anyone be interested in lifesized prints of that cover painting? Don't have any idea what the price would be ...

We bought first North American publication rights to the art. Ownership of the art stayed with the artist and he could resell his work if he wanted.

On the WBH cover, we bought the first publication rights from AC Farley just as always, then I negotiated a deal with Farley to buy the piece outright because I liked it so well.

So now I am the owner of that one piece of art, at least. As to the rest, they are owned by their artists. Roger got all the pieces I painted, so those are in his hands now. The rest depend on what the artist did with them.

Can you tell us about the streamlined "fast combat" system you came up with?

I don't remember many of the rules details but I do remember the concept. The basic idea is:

- Some pre-setup computations and table lookups to determine weapon, armor, and range relationships and some difficulty modifiers.
- Some simplified tasks for various common combat activities.
- Have a quick way to figure out if you are still in the battle or not for the NPCs. You don't really care about the details of NPCs since there can be so many of them for the ref to run, so the idea is to lighten the ref's management burden. If the NPC's still standing, then he's still opposing the PCs. Otherwise, he's out of the battle and that's that. Minimal detail.
- Just a bit more info for the player characters. For the PC's just figure out if they are ok, wounded (less effective) or out. Worry about the details after the battle. After the battle, figure out what really happened in terms of damage. OK can mean not a scratch or some minor damage. Wounded can mean minor to major damage. And out can mean serious damage to dead.
- Combat was in one minute intervals with these simplified tasks. Players would describe what they wanted to do, the ref would describe what the NPCs were doing, we'd roll a few dice for tasks and see who was left in the battle. We used counters and a simplified map of the battlefield.
- Then the next turn, and so on.

Leave it to the ref to make it an interesting fight. Once in a while, have some guy they thought was down "come back".

I had notes on all this somewhere, but I've lost track of the notes. Perhaps someone can take these basic ideas and reconstruct a fast combat system from them. Conveying effect and keeping things moving by minimizing the computational workload were the keys that made it work.

Why no errata for the Referee's Companion?

If I recall correctly, Ref's companion was GDW and our attempt to right some of the wrongs caused by the MegaTraveller rules edition rush.

Ref's Companion had a more lenient schedule, and a lot of it was done in-house by GDW. I also believe the switch to Macs had started by the time Ref's Companion was underway.

Can you tell me anything about the copyright to the map of Regina in WBH?

Copyright protects the expression of the idea but not the idea itself. In other words, as long as you don't copy the map exactly, you should be fine.

Use a different font, a different size (larger or smaller) of map form, different symbols for terrain, more details, etc.

But the basic idea of how Regina looks and what is where is the idea part and you should be free to reuse it in your own material. Just don't copy the map exactly.

What is up with Pluto in the supplement Solomani & Aslan?

[Full question: In Cats and Rats (Solomani and Aslan, and your name of course appears in some part of the credits), they detail the Terra system post 3I control. They mention that the Imperium had slapped some sort of quarantine or interdict on Pluto. They mention the Solomani have continued it. No one ever says why. What is up with Pluto? Or was this just a plot hook that GMs could develop on their own?]

Nothing planned. Just leaving things open ended for creative ref's to run with.

Why can't great swords penetrate archaic armor, while standard bullets can?

First as to the armor and penetration for bullets versus swords, I just based my info on work that had gone before me in CT and Striker.

However, it occurs to me that a roleplaying game, like supposedly "realistic" movies often stretch the truth just a bit to make a good story. And it's okay for a RPG simulation to do the same. Nothing's perfect, even computer simulations.