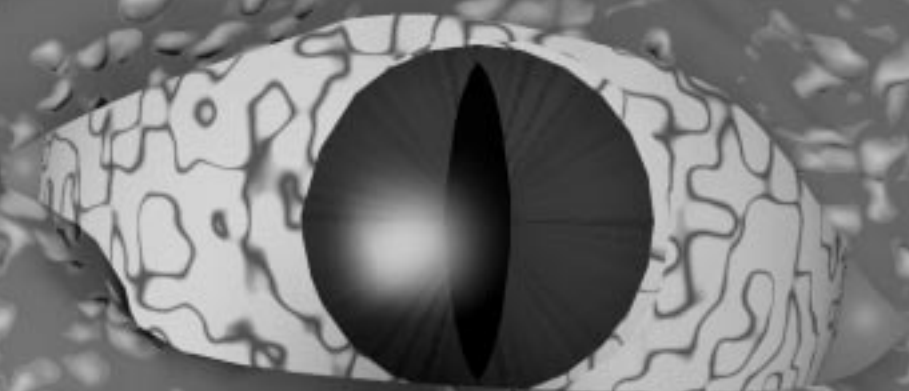


Northern Lights

Almost a theme issue

**Issue
3-97
May**



Contents:

**Off the Top of My Head 2
Building a Large Space
Station 3
Musty Tomes 7
Comments 9**



Off the Top of My Head

Jumping the gun

As you will notice, I am jumping the gun by publishing some space station material in this issue. I have written an overview of the station that I hope can serve as a starting point for other work. Most of it has been published via email, but I have dressed it up a bit with a few pictures. I also added a few scenario seeds. I needed something to fill all the sidebar space.

The advantage of the cylinder-with-many-floors design I am proposing is that it can accommodate many very different designs. Each floor is pretty self-contained. Its environment doesn't affect the environment of other floors at

Northern Lights was produced using FrameMaker 5.1.1, Corel Draw 7.0, Corel PhotoPaint 7.0, Imagine for Windows, and a variety of other software. The computer platform was an XPAND Pentium 120 PC.

In addition, clip art from Corel Draw was also used.

The layout was made in FrameMaker 5.1.1 and emailed to the CM for printing.

Northern Lights © 1997 by Henrik Mårtensson

GURPS® is a registered trademark held by Steve Jackson Games. No infringement on their trademark is intended. Use of other trademarks is not intended as a challenge of said trademarks. No infringement is intended.

Henrik Mårtensson

Januarigatan 26

S-415 15 Gothenburg

SWEDEN

Phone: +46 31 46 86 57

e-mail: henrik.martensson@swipnet.se

all. This makes the project a lot easier to coordinate. Another advantage is that there is *a lot* of usable space inside. There is room for many different creatures, many different environments, and thus many different scenarios.

Imagine — landscapes of the mind

You might wonder where the illustrations in this issue came from. You didn't? I'll tell you anyhow.

I have been fiddling with Imagine, a 3D program, for a while. The illustrations in this issue are part of the result. It's been great fun, but, oh boy, it does take a lot of time to make a few pictures. There will be more in the next issue.

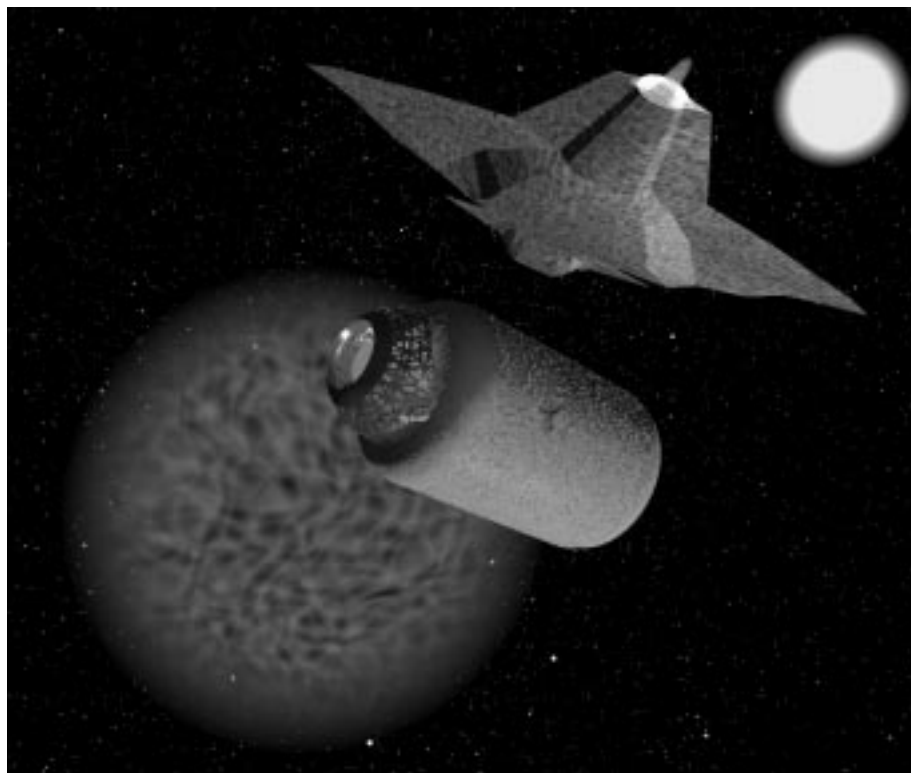
Easter Island Voodoo gaming

I have managed to do a bit of gaming, as a player for a change. Jörgen, a friend of mine went to the Easter Island on his vacation, and came back with a scenario idea. We are using GURPS, with the magic rules from GURPS Voodoo.

Its been fun so far, if one enjoys playing PCs that are clueless, outsmarted, outgunned, and generally outclassed. Its strange how perfectly simple plots can grow so mysterious when you are at the receiving end of them. I'm planning my revenge. I'm writing a new scenario of my own¹...

1. Perhaps I'll have it ready for the next issue.

Henrik Mårtensson



Building a Large Space Station

Yes, I know I am one issue early, but if you want to use my general space station design as a framework for your own work, you need to have it available. So, here goes:

The following large space station design is my interpretation, and extrapolation, of Bill's writeup in AotA #31. The station design is essentially the same as the one I circulated via the AotA mailing list, but with some illustrations.

Station Data

The station is cylinder shaped, 482,7 km (300 mi.) long, and with a 120 km (74.6 mi.) radius. A hole, 45 km (28.0 mi.) in radius, has been drilled straight through the length of the cylinder.

The cylinder is spun at 0.011 rad/s (9 minutes, 27.7 seconds per full rotation) to provide gravitation.

The station is designed for inhabitants of many different species, living under gravities from 0.6 G to 1.4 G. The 0.6 G floor is 48 km (29.83 mi.) from the central axis of the cylinder. The 1.4 G floor is 112 km (69.61 mi.) from the center.

Adventure seeds

So, we have a really big space station. What are we going to with it?

I did not have time to write a full blown scenario, so here are a few adventure seeds instead:

The starbase seed

It is common knowledge that the ancient rase that built the space station had, and used, nanotechnology. An old friend of one of the PCs, Haralreesalar (Student-of-ancient-ways), an Irari¹ researcher, has deciphered the Song of an ancient Kyhree-crystal². The Song tells of how the space station was grown from a starbase seed³, and it also hints that hidden on a ghost floor, there will be a new seed.

Haralreesalar asks his PC friend to join the expedition, and to recruit dependable and competent help.

The Song tells how to access the ghost floor, but it is a hell-hole. The gravity is 1.3 G, it is very hot, very damp, and was once home to a saurian species that liked to live very close to nature. The entire floor is a jungle nightmare. (Think of Harry Harrison's Deathworld.)

In addition to natural dangers, there is also competition. Haralreesalar has published a paper on the translation of the Song, and it has drawn the attention of the Goliath weaponry, GmbH. Goliath has dispatched a team of specialists to

1. Described in GURPS Aliens.
2. You are not cleared to know what a Kyhree-crystal is. They sing beautifully. Sometimes the Song holds knowledge, very rarely, it kills. It is always beautiful. (Maybe, if your clearance level rises, I'll provide a full description in the next issue.
3. Northern Lights 2-97 in AotA#31.

retrieve the starbase seed. They have orders to use any means, and to leave no witnesses.

The last Kyhree singer

During the past six months, no less than eleven Kyhree-crystals of unknown origin have been sold on the station.

One of the crystals was bought by the Jintarra embassy and presented as a gift to the Kronin ambassador. Unfortunately, it held a Deathsong that killed not only the Kronin ambassador, but also his wife, two children, and part of his staff.

The Kronin are vowing to avenge the death of their ambassador, and the Jintarra are terrified. They are a minor species that achieved FTL travel only twenty years ago, and their homeworld is only five parsec from the Kronin border. If the Jintarra can not prove their innocence, they will be drawn into a war they cannot win. Of course they turn to the PCs. (The average Jintarra is only 10 inches tall. They are ill equipped to manage an investigation in the rough and tumble environment of the space station.)

The PCs soon find out that there is quite a market for Kyhree crystals on the station, what is more, they can be custom ordered. Somewhere on the station there is a live Kyhree singer¹, and someone ordered a Deathsong crystal and sold it to the Jintarra.

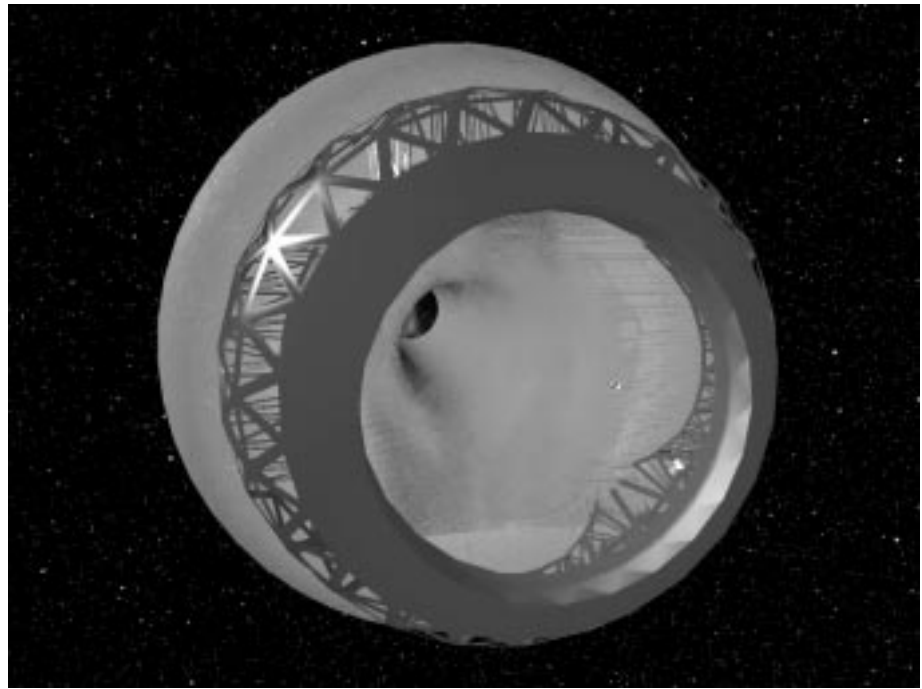
The PCs begin to uncover a plot to start a Jintarra-Kronin war, but will they do it in time?

The refugees

This is a scenario for PCs that play some part in the administration of the station.

A slower-than-light ship with

1. The Kyhree, as everyone knows, have been considered to be extinct for at least 50,000 years.



Floors worlds apart

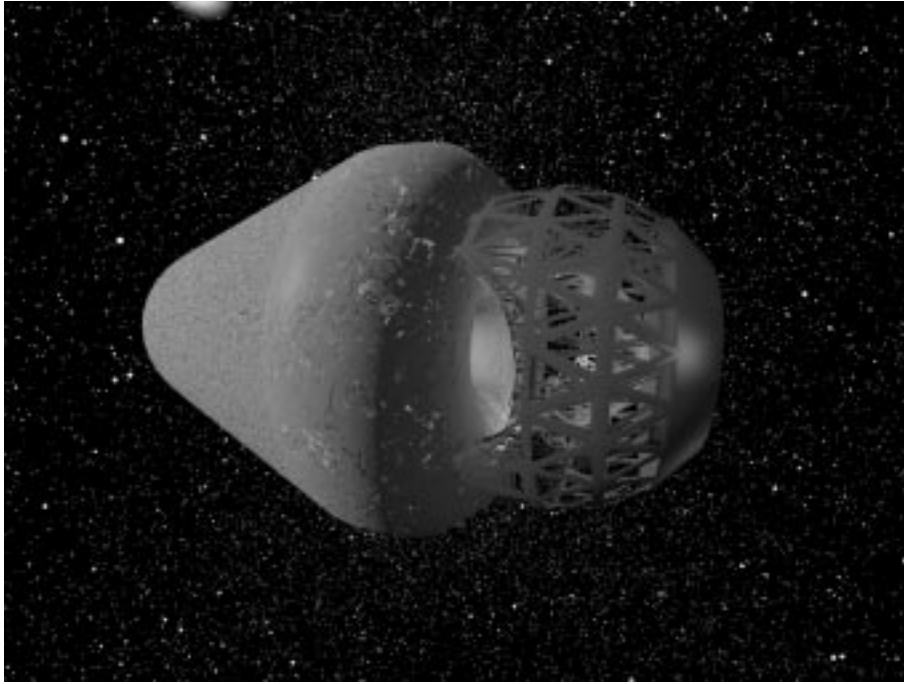
There are 1500 (known) floors. In most places, the ceiling of a floor is no more than 5 m high. The floors are 50 m (55.6 yards) apart. This means only 5-10% of the available space is used. There is room enough to hide entire countries between the accessible levels.

The smallest, 0.6 G floor, is 145,578 km² (56,232 sq. mi.). The largest floor, at the 1.4 G level, is 339,684 km² (131,208 sq.mi.).

Radiation shielding and propulsion

Though the 1.4 G level is 112 km from the central axis, the radius of the cylinder making up the station is 120 km. This leaves an 8 km thick shield, mostly of crystallised carbon, that is, diamond, that protects from radiation and meteor strikes.

The station has a propulsion system for making minor course corrections, and for slower than light travel. The cylinder that is the body of the station is wrapped in a supra-conducting coil. Running current through the coil, an enourmously strong magnetic field can be created. The magnetic field sucks hydrogen atoms in through one end of the cylinder, accelerates them along the full length of the cylinder, and expells them through the other end. Reversing direction is a simple matter of switching polarity in the coil. The ion drive can also be used as an incredibly powerful weapon.



Space docks

There are several space docks of different sizes in the central hole running through the length of the station. To dock, a ship must fly down what is essentially a 480 km long ion gun barrel. Ships of up to one million tons can be accommodated at the largest docks. There are few ships that large capable of landing in a 0.6 G environment, however.

Tech levels

The station is built using TL 13+ technology, including nanotech, but all vital systems aboard, though vast in scale, are easily understood, and maintained at TL 10, and with some difficulty at TL 9. Why the station was built so that it could be maintained by civilizations at least 3 TLs below the one that built it is not known, though it has been the cause of much speculation.

Population

The station currently has about 2 million inhabitants, but can easily hold 500 times as many. There are still large, unexplored areas, and entire floors that have been sealed off. There are also persistent rumours of “ghost floors”, hidden floors, between some of the known 1500 floors. Sometimes artifact hunters go to unknown floors. Most return empty-handed, some not at all, but a few, very few, have been lucky and found ancient artifacts.



5,000 cryogenically frozen Vessorians¹ reach the station. The Vessorians ask for asylum from an enemy, and before the station administrators can make a decision, the alien intelligence serving as the station control system grants it.

The Vessorians are revived and 5,000 of the scariest looking creatures in the galaxy disembark into the station.

Soon, there are problems. Several Cidri disappear, and the Vessorians are accused of having made snacks of them. (There was an unfortunate accident the very first day, when a newly revived, and somewhat dazed, Vessorian mistook a Cidri for a snack. The Vessorians eat only living food, and they like to hunt it first. They don't normally eat intelligent creatures — but accidents can happen.)

Kronin challenge Vessorians to duels seventeen times the first week — there is something about a heavily armed, superstrong, lightning quick opponent they cannot resist — the results are seventeen dead Kronin. The Kronin ambassador wants the bodies back for burial, while the Vessorians maintain that the food goes to the victor. (While Vessorians do not normally eat intelligent beings, vanquished enemies are another matter. Besides, noone that challenges a Vessorian to a close combat duel can be considered intelligent anyhow.)

The PCs have to find the missing Cidri, pacify the Kronin, and integrate the Vessorians into the station culture with a minimum of bloodshed. Then, the Vessorian's pursuers show up...

1. See NL #1-94 in AotA #17.

Musty Tomes

It has been a while since I wrote book reviews, so I have a bunch to select from. Let's dive right into them:

Silverhand — The Arcana, Book 1

By Morgan Llywellyn and Michael Scott. This is the first book of a fantasy series based on Celtic mythology. A young hero coming into power, evil mages, ancient artifacts of immense power, this book has got it all. It is well written too. Actually, it is the best fantasy book I've read in quite some time. A highly recommended read. Now, if I could only find the other books in the series...

The Man-Eaters of Tsavo

By Lt. Colonel J.H. Patterson, D.S.O. Did you see the movie *The Ghost and the Darkness*? It was based on a true story, and this is it. Patterson was overseeing the building of a British railway in East Africa in 1898. The project ran into trouble when two lions, one white, the other almost black, started to attack the workers. During a period of several months, the lions killed nearly 400 people. The workers were understandably terrified, and the entire railroad project was brought to a standstill. There were numerous attempts to kill the lions, but they seemed invincible. As you might guess, it was Patterson who finally brought the man-eaters down, and he wrote a book about it.

Patterson was better at building railways and shooting lions than he was at writing, but the book is still interesting, because it is such an interesting story. It is also rife with material that can be adapted for roleplaying.

The Lost World

By Michael Crichton. Jurassic Park was a rivetingly exciting read that breathed new life into the man-meets-dinosaur subgenre of fantasy (or SF, if you prefer). The follow up is a very pale rerun. You have probably seen the movie already, so you know the basic story. It is six years after the Jurassic Park disaster, but dinosaurs have survived on an island used for dinosaur breeding. Ian Malcolm, full time pessimist and part time mathematician goes there with some other people who are along just to get eaten, and, surprise, surprise, two kids! Yeach! I hope Crichton got a lot of money for writing this, because he can't have gotten much else out of it.

Skip this one. It's old stuff, just barely warmed over.

Finn MacCool

By Morgan Llewellyn. Once again, Morgan Llewellyn dips into Celtic myth. This time she tells the tale of Finn MacCool, mighty warrior, poet, lover, and liar. We get to follow him from his youth until he is an old man. Llewellyn brings characters, Celtic culture, and the landscape to life in a way that is all to rare.

This isn't fantasy, but it is close. Fantasy or not, it is a ripping good yarn.

Comments

I haven't made any comments for a couple of issues now, so this time I just got to. They'll be short though, because I have already blown the deadline, and I've got to ship this issue off to Robert.

Steve Dickie

Welcome to the club! My compliments on an interesting first issue.

Brett Slocum

I've never played Tékumel, though I read one of the books once. I have a hazy memory of something a bit like the Ru'un, but I may misremember.

Bill Collins

I enjoyed *The Maykrantz Formula* a lot. The station history writeup was good. It helped a lot when I designed the physical framework for the station. (I hope everyone will want to use it.)

Arthur Shipkowski

Are the Keepers partly inspired by the Immortals RPG? It also had amnesiac immortals.

The Hacker's Code of Honor should make it into the next edition of the Basic Set.

David S. Carter

I liked the general setup of the Men In Black scenario, but I would have liked a little more development. While the background is clear enough, the GM will have to wing it practically all the way once the game begins. Some of the very best games are run that way, but still, it wouldn't hurt to have a few prepared encounters, some ready made leads to steer the PCs along the right way, etc.

I began a MIB campaign myself a while ago. It fizzled. The PCs started out as FBI agents, and the idea was that they would be recruited by a secret organization, and become MIBs. Of course they missed their chance, despite some rather broad hints. Sigh!

I would like to see your promised rant about indexing very much. I hope it is in AotA #32.

Lisa Steele

The two-column layout you have used the past two issues is a great improvement! I enjoyed your 'zine. And I liked the Tom Lehrer quote. (I've got three Tom Lehrer CDs, and a while ago I came up with the idea of writing a scenario based on Tom Lehrer quotes. I haven't done anything about it yet though.)

Scott Maykrantz

Some of your phobias might come in handy now and then. I enjoyed the 'zine.

Everyone

Even if I had no comments, I read and enjoyed your 'zine of course.

You may have noted an absense of RML material in this issue. This is because I have had to take a break from RML to manage other parts of my life, like my job, my marriage...

The RML project is still on though. Arthur has made a few interesting suggestions, and I'll follow them up. I'll tell you more in the next issue. (This is of course a promise I make with my fingers crossed.)

In the next issue:

The Jumper

They promised to get him out from death row if he did a thing for them. He did. Then they betrayed him. But he survived.

The Jumper

He has a list. Seven men and two women who destroyed his life. They will all die.

The Jumper

A secret they cannot keep. An enemy they cannot see. A fury they cannot match. A power they cannot deny.

