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WD: *How long have you been interested in FRPs?*

MM: I have been in role-playing since 1968 or so, primarily participating in, and designing, political simulations, the kind that do nominating conventions, or the workings of the legislative process. As an undergraduate, I was in several, and in 1972 and '73 I was designing them for class-room use.

I encountered *D&D* soon after it came out, and although I initially disliked it (preferring *The Battle of the Coral Sea* and *The Russo-Japanese War* at the time). I soon ended up refereeing an extensive campaign that included just about the entire *GDW* staff. After several weeks, it got put on the back burner because it was taking up too much of the working day.

Since then, I have been interested in various FRPs off and on, depending on time and on the attractiveness of the actual campaign.

By the way, I sometimes get uncomfortable about the term FRP. I understand that most of the games in role-playing are fantasy — thus fantasy role-playing. But all of us at *GDW* have tried to make *Traveller* realistic, rather than fantastic. I realize that we can't change the terminology of the hobby, but I do consider that FRP also includes realistic and historical role-playing as well as fantasy.

WD: *What are your other interests apart from gaming?*

MM: At the risk of sounding like a wide-ranging crazy, I'll try to be honest and cover them all. I like science fiction, and read SF paper-backs all the time, as well as see every SF movie that comes to town. Actually, I go to see every movie that comes to town, not just the science fiction.

I like guns, and have an extensive collection of Savage automatic pistols: I like submarines, although I have no collection of them, not even one. I like writing, and some day I'll get some fiction out of my typewriter and there will be *Traveller* stories on the bookshelf. Well enough of non-games stuff . . . back to business.

WD: *What are your views on the subject of FRPs — do you see them as distictly different in role or appeal to, say, tabletop miniatures battles or boardgames?*

MM: I see the hobby as tripartite, with overlap. People are into one facet of the hobby primarily, be it board games, or miniatures, or role-playing. Overlap is the individual's attempt to expand on that primary area of interest. Thus, the role-player moves into miniatures in order to enhance his individual characters, or into boardgaming to resolve the various large-scale battles that his campaigns have created. Similarly, the board-gamer may move into role-playing in order to see more of the particular background of a Science Fiction (or other) board game that he has been caught up in.

Everyone has his (or her) own area of interest; the basic divisions of the hobby are just different ways of appealing to that interest.

WD: *What is the history of* Games Designers' Workshop, *and how long have you been involved in the company?*

MM: There are actually a lot of different ways to tell the history of *GDW*, depending on the person telling the history and his mood, and even on the audience. Let me try one on you.

In 1972, Frank Chadwick, Rich Banner, myself, and several others were all games club members at Illinois State University, and we all (to varying degrees) spent our time in the University Union playing games, mostly *SPI* and *AH* titles. I seem to remember such games as *Richthofen's War, Borodino,* and *Red Star White Star.* The games club procured a grant to produce hex sheets, and we ended up with about a thousand, on which we could draw our own maps. The most notable was a variant of *Borodino* which we called *Guerre,* and another similar game called *Swamp.* We spent hours playing the game, revising the rules, and just enjoying ourselves.

After a few months of this, Rich and Frank talked the University into establishing SIMRAD (Simulations Research Analysis and Design), which was supposed to produce simulations to specification for class-room use. We did, and all of us learned a lot, designing games for minimum wages. Although titles meant little, I was head designer, which meant that I had a finger in most of the pies we designed. The University, however, had a short-sighted view that all good academics had degrees and documentation for their ideas, which we obviously did not, and cut our funding.

The top people from SIMRAD became *GDW,* kicking it off with *Drang Nach Osten,* giving the gaming public a division-level Russian Front game at least six months before SPI did. I think that had a lot to do with our success; doing a big game that was exactly what a lot of people wanted, and then following it up with more of the big game (*Unentschieden*), plus several games that were not in the same vein — *Triplanetary, Chaco,* and *Eagles.*

Since then, we have just been turning out games that we designers wanted to do.

WD: *What are the company's future plans?*

MM: In a sentence, to keep turning out good games. Sometimes it is difficult to plan exactly what we are going to do, and we have always reserved to ourselves the right to abandon any project to postpone it if we don't think it will work out. Sometimes it seems that we are leading an unplanned corporate life, but it lets us put out things we want to do, and are proud of. Our future plans are to keep on doing just that.

WD: *What was the original inspiration for* Traveller*?*

MM: Long before *Imperium* was published in 1977, we had a wide-ranging board game called *Imperium* and had been playing with it for several years. It was more-or-less intended as another game to follow *Triplanetary,* but we held off and worked more fully on historical games instead. Nevertheless, this *Imperium* was an enjoyable game that we played from time to time. In it, we had the first essence of role-playing. On each side, the player was the president or dictator or emperor or whatever that led that group of planets. To add spice to the game, each of these players had a son or daughter. That character could enter the army or navy or civil service or scouts or whatever, and grew up in real time as the game progressed. In addition, he or she improved, gained rank, and had benefits for the forces of the side. For example, a son in the navy might grow from ensign to admiral, all the while adding die mods in battle to help his ships win. The key to this extensive rule was to give the leader a sense of perspective, because if the son or daughter was killed, there was no replacement. It came to be a balance between risking your son for gain, or protecting him for potential later use.

I think a lot of *Traveller* grew out of that rule.

Of course, later developments in role-playing made their mark on the game. *D&D* influenced it greatly, as did *En Garde!* (by Frank Chadwick here at *GDW).*

WD: *Some people are bound to see* Traveller *as "*D&D *in Space". Would you care to comment on the differences between the two systems — and the reasons for them?*

MM: I suppose that if *Traveller* had come first, then *D&D* would be called *Traveller* with Magic. There will obviously be comparisons with *D&D* because that game is fast becoming a generic term for role-playing.

There are several differences, and I think important ones, between the two systems.

First of all, *Traveller* is science fiction, while *D&D* is fantasy. That means (to me at least) that *Traveller* doesn't have magic, or magic monsters, or spells. It does mean that *Traveller* tries to base its contents on science and on the reasonable expectations that we have for science in the coming years.

Second, *Traveller* is modern, while *D&D* is set in ancient or medieval eras. As a result, *Traveller* must include the wide range of modern (and future) weapons, vehicles and devices that are not available to the middle ages.

Third, and perhaps most important, *Traveller* is intended to be wide ranging. Adventures can take place anywhere, in space, on a world, in a starship, at sea, anywhere. This freedom to go anywhere and do anything (as a basic part of the game) is really important because it opens endless horizons to the players.

WD: *Do you find any inspiration in SF films, novels, etc.? If so, which ones particularly influence you?*

MM: You name it, and if it didn't inspire me, it influenced me.

Off the top of my head, I can mention most of the science fiction series novels, including Poul Anderson's *Dominic Flandry* series, E.C. Tubb's *Dumarest* series, and Jack Vance's *Demon Prince* series. Movies and television particularly affected me. Actually, *Star Wars* came out after the manuscript for *Traveller* was finished but I was pleased to see that I could probably do that scenario in *Traveller* if I wanted.

I can also pick out little things that I think I know where they came from. The inertial tracker came from Robert Heinlein's *Podkayne of Mars;* the artificial psionic shield helmet came from Poul Anderson's *Flandry of Terra;* the pinnaces came from Niven and Pournelle's *The Mote in God's Eye.* And those are just things, not game concepts.

Actually, I have always seen *Traveller* as a way for science fiction readers to duplicate any particular piece of science fiction, and to allow them to go off in corridors that the story never touched.

WD: *What games do you most enjoy playing yourself?*

MM: *Traveller* comes first, of course. I spend hours every day on *Traveller,* and if I didn't enjoy it, I could easily go crazy. I play *Traveller* at least once a week, twice a week when I can find both time and players.

I do little else in the way of role-playing, but I enjoy board games, ones that I have designed and ones that others have produced.

I think *Chaco* (my own design, and now out of print) is a fast, fun game which has always been aimed at exactly the casual level of play that I prefer. *Year of the Rat* (by John Prados) is another favourite; the frustration index of that game makes it a wonderful simulation of Vietnam.

For deeper, more absorbing play, I like *Narvik* (by Rich Banner and Frank Chadwick); the game really requires a lot of staff-type work in planning and maintaining the invasion of Norway and can be very rewarding if proper attention is paid to the game.

Finally, I like several science fiction games. These include *Imperium* (my own design again), *Stellar Conquest* (by Howard Thompson of *Metagaming), The Awful Green Things* (by Tom Whamm of *TSR),* and *Dune* (by *Future Pastimes* and *AH).* By the way, I took second place in the *Awful Green Things* tournament at Gencon last year, and was robbed of first place by one of *GDW's* developers who will remain nameless for spite.

Kind of a long list, isn't it?

WD: *Are you involved in any other projects, or*

will you continue to expand the Traveller *Universe at the current prolific rate?*
MM: Are you giving me a choice? Can't I do both?

Actually, I am currently concentrating on *Traveller* projects, but I have several non-*Traveller,* non-Science-Fiction things in the works. Most prominent on my schedule is *1943!* a small-sized fast and playable game of the Italian Campaign of WW II. It promises to be much like my previous *1942!,* which dealt with the Japanese in Malaya and Java. I would also like to do a game on *Marathon, 490 BC,* but that particular game seems to be progressing much slower.

WD: *Were you surprised at* Traveller's *popularity, given that most people seem to prefer adventuring in medieval settings?*
MM: I was pleased at *Traveller's* popularity, but not actually surprised. I have been a Science Fiction person from way back, and I always personally felt I would rather role-play in space than in a fantasy setting.

Further, I think that the statement that most people would rather adventure in a medieval setting is misleading, because they do so when the game calls for it. Even *TSR* has seen fit to put out science fiction role-playing games, because even they see that many people like the wide open spaces of the stars and a modern era for an adventuring setting.

WD: *A notable feature of the game is the apparent lack of levels and experience points. What was the reasoning behind this?*
MM: *Traveller* is trying to be realistic, and the whole experience thing was one of the first areas to go when *Traveller* was being put together. *D&D,* and many imitations of *D&D,* use experience as a way of keeping score, for which it serves quite well. But experience points are not realistic, and even the fantasy role-play designers keep editorializing about keeping experience points in check.

In the first year and a half of *Traveller,* this point was one of the most frequently asked by *Traveller* players. Since then, it has died down quite a bit, as players realize that there are other things they can look for and find in their adventures in *Traveller.*

Let me make more of the point on realism in *Traveller* and this experience thing. Most people in their real lives don't improve much as they live out their lives. They may make marginal improvements, picking up a skill here or there, but probably on an annual basis, if not less frequently. The really important things are the greater understanding of how life in general works. In *Traveller,* that translates to experience with the game and shows itself as the player improves his or her quality of play.

WD: *Another unique feature of the game is that beginning adventurers are middle-aged, and have already spent many years adventuring before play begins — sometimes dying before then. Why is that?*
MM: The idea started with a reaction to the constant character generation for most fantasy role-playing games — that each character begins essentially the same, with no background or advantage, and each then advances in the game through the various levels. My thought was to provide some quick and easy adventuring for the character BEFORE the game began; with that batch of experience, skills, and money, the character then sets out on adventures within the game. Because we were paying attention to realism, this new system was forced to include aging, and to include decisions that the character himself did not make, like forced retirement, or potential death.

The system also evolved a little because it was so useful for creating non-player characters — what I recommend is that players who are generating characters just for fun should then save them for later use as non-player characters in encounters.

The fact that some of these characters may die during the generation process is intended as a disincentive for indescriminate character generation.

Finally, this character generation system gives a much broader spectrum of characters for the game. The adventuring bands are no longer groups of 18 year old boys, but have wide ranges in age and areas of expertise. The players can more fully interact, and complement each other's skills. It makes for more co-operation within the game itself.

WD: *How many people do you estimate currently play* Traveller *— and what kind of people are they?*
MM: I would put the number of people that play *Traveller,* counting referees and players, at nearly 100,000. That's based on the number of games sold, plus the extremely fast sales for both supplements and adventures. That figure may be low, but I think it is fairly accurate.

What kind of people are they? They like science fiction, although their tastes are wide ranging; and they like to enjoy themselves. They enjoy the freedom that role-playing games in general give them, and that the science fiction of *Traveller* specifically gives them.

From what I see, there is a lot of spill-over between fantasy and science fiction role-playing. Being in one does not keep them from being in the other.

WD: *Many gamers complain that* Traveller *is too complex for beginners, particularly beginning umpires and referees, who are often put off by the amount of work required before play can commence. At the other end of the scale are people who say the rules system is too simplistic, not detailed enough. What are your views on this?*
MM: I think if you look at most role-playing games (or board games, or miniatures rules), you will see an informal learning process taking place. I remember that the first game I ever saw *(D-Day,* from *Avalon Hill,* back in 1962) was a game I dearly wanted to play, but never could, because the rules were unintelligible to both me and my friend. Ten years later, I was introduced to *France, 1940* through a games club, and learned the rules in a one-on-one setting from someone who already knew how to play. I think a lot of that's happening in games today — the clubs or the informal groups teach the players enough to get them into a game; thereafter, it's all learned by actually reading the rules.

I like to think that *Traveller* is easier to learn than most games, but I certainly don't dispute that any player would learn a lot from a club or an informal group situation.

By the way, I think that with the publication of the short Double Adventures *(Shadows/Annic Nova,* and *Mission on Mithral/Bright Face),* it is possible for a referee and group of players to literally adventure the same day that the booklet is bought. The preparation required is simply a knowledge of the *Traveller* rules and a quick read-through of the adventure by the referee.

As for the people who feel that *Traveller* is too simplistic, I can only reply that we are constantly at work doing new things for *Traveller* — new background, new scenarios, and new rules. And the game is open-ended anyway: anyone can add new rules for greater complexity if they want. In fact, the *Journal* regularly publishes a selection of what is submitted.

WD: *Will every section of* Traveller *eventually be expanded along the lines of* Mercenary *and* High Guard*?*
MM: I don't really think so, at least not in the sense that you mean.

There may be a *Grand Survey,* which would deal with the scouts. There probably won't be a merchant book, and there certainly won't be an 'other' book. But then again, there is *Supplement 4 — Citizens of the Imperium,* which can be taken as a wider character generation approach to others.

You have to keep in mind that the *Traveller* rules are rules governing an entire universe — they obviously cannot approach completeness on all aspects of that universe. So instead, the basic three books cover a little of everything, at least enough to get the players adventuring. When the referee decides to delve into mercenary operation, the *Mercenary* book is there for him to use.

Mercenary and *High Guard* were responses to demand from the playing public. Aside from a scout service book, I see the greatest demand to be for rules governing aliens and robots. I think those would be the areas we would address next.

WD: *Why did you choose to represent space as two-dimensional? Is this a matter of mapping convenience, or does it reflect the nature of the drive system of* Traveller *starships — for example, Cordwainer Smith's "planoforming" or the use of co-ordinate spacetime, which would be better represented by a 2D map?*
MM: I am not ashamed to say that the two-dimensionality of the *Traveller* starmaps is entirely a matter of convenience. Most of *Traveller* takes place not between the stars. Given the relatively low emphasis on those areas, I saw no need to entirely reproduce them in three dimensions.

I have always held that most *Traveller* referees could easily establish a 3D mapping system for their own campaigns if they really wanted to. I know several who have. But the net benefit from such a system is very low when compared with the ease of rendition and use of the 2D system which we are using.

WD: *Why does* Traveller *use only six-sided dice throughout? And in particular, why are characteristics diced up on 2d6 rather than the more 'realistic' 3d6?*
MM: When the original manuscript for *Traveller* was being playtested, the very basic foundation for random number generation was (as in most role-playing games) based on dice. I had to make some decisions on what dice to use and how to use them.

My first decision was to limit *Traveller* to six-sided dice. I knew that other games called for a wide range of polyhedral dice, sometimes even specifying non-dice such as 1d17, and then explaining how to achieve the specific results using various dice or random number generators.

I instead elected to restrict *Traveller* to six-sided dice. Six-sided dice are ubiquitous; they are easily obtained, and most people are familiar with them. Conversely, polyhedral dice are not generally available (except at hobby shops, now, some years later), and the average person is not familiar with them.

Moreover, the relationship of two dice to each other is a widely known one. One die, when rolled, gives an even probability of a result from 1 to 6; two dice give a range from 1 to 12 with a weighted probability toward 7. It was this familiar relationship that I wanted to exploit.

One rather essential part of the *Traveller* character is the UPP — its six characteristics, listed in order, are best and most easily read if each characteristic is a single digit. The range from 1 to 10 seemed too restricted. However, if I used two dice to produce a range from 2 to 12, and then used hexadecimal notation (0 to 9, then A to F for 10 to 15) to express the characteristic, I had a range from 0 to 15, with room for improvement, as well as disastrous downgrading for each characteristic.

In addition, I use the dice throws as basic throws for a variety of actions. If strength can be taken as an expression of personal strength and an ability to perform a task that requires such strength, then the characteristic (for example, 7) is the throw (or less) to accomplish the specific task. After allowing DMs for applicable circumstances, skills, environment, and anything else that is important, I have a throw for success or failure. More importantly, I have related it directly to the character involved. Most importantly, the player manipulating that character has this basic information in front of him at all times. If three dice had been used to create characteristics, the bell curve of such results would make this method rather ineffective.

Finally, I would be less than honest if I did not say that I was aware that *D&D* used three dice and that I was trying to diverge from and improve upon the methods I saw in use in that game. I think I achieved what I set out to do. ■