

UNIVERSE CommLink

A Regular Feature for Universe Players

by John Butterfield

Universe has generated a lot of interest very quickly; so, to keep in touch with its devotees, *Universe CommLink* will appear in every issue of *Ares*. I would like to begin with an apology. The name of an important contributor to *Universe* was unwittingly left off the credits. John Boardman provided me with reams of information and helped with the calculations that made production of the *Universe* interstellar display possible. I'd like to use this first column to state where we stand with the ongoing *Universe* project. In columns to come I'll present notes on NPC generation, a combat aiming and ammunition system, a spaceship record and a lot of other little ideas.

The Public Speaks

Included in *Universe* was an 8½" x 11" sheet of feedback questions and a response card much like the feedback section in *Ares*. An early sampling of these cards gave us a strong feeling for what is desired in terms of future *Universe* product. The top eight vote getters among possible publications are (in order):

Universal Hardware (Question 35, also in *Ares 9* Feedback). This is running away with the early lead; I guess you're all equipment freaks. I'm hot on getting this one out as well. At the moment we plan to combine this proposal with the *Harmonics Catalog* proposal (see below) to create a big *Universe Equipment Guide*. Every weapon, robot, vehicle, spaceship and other piece of technology mentioned in the GM Guide will have an illustration or schematic diagram and an expanded explanation detailing all its specs and functions. Many new types of equipment will also be included. The book will probably be larger than the GM Guide and will come out in the late summer of '82.

First Contact (#41). This is already in development and will be published in February, '82; see below.

Universe Magazine (#50). We do not at the moment have the production capacity to put out another regular magazine. We hope to start up a role-playing magazine in the not-to-distant future that will feature *Universe* and *DragonQuest* adventures, additions and advice, as well as information and reviews on all role-playing products. For the time being, attention to *Universe* will increase in *Ares*, beginning with this column in every issue and mini-adventures in every other issue to come.

Harmonics Catalog (#39 and in *Ares 9*). This spaceship supplement will be combined with *Universal Hardware*; see above.

Combat Expansion Kit (#45). Although we plan to do this at some point, it is not yet scheduled. Much of the detailed weapon information planned for this supplement will appear in the hardware supplement.

Space Stations and Orbital Craft (#36 and in *Ares 9*). Publication is distant.

GM Pack (#43). The GM screen and the world generation logs have already been published; see below.

Metropolis (#38 and in *Ares 10*). This one excites me the most. The city map should be a real beauty. We hope to produce it by the end of '82.

The Best of Known Space, Cygnus Carina Arm and Federal Forces proposals also did well. The real loser of the group was **Innerspace**; a supplement about underwater and underground adventuring. I guess no one likes to get wet or dirty in the future. The most popular parts of *Universe* according to you were the Interstellar Display, the Orionis World Logs, and the rules for world generation, skills and character generation. The sections you feel are in the most need of expansion are spaceships and creatures, NPC's and other encounters.

It has come to my attention that many copies of *Universe* included the feedback response card but not the questionnaire. If you found this to be the case in your game, send the card to us blank, except for your name and address and I'll send you a question sheet and a new card. It's early yet in response tabulation so we still want to get more responses.

GM Pack

You've probably seen ads for the *Universe GM Pack* in *Ares* recently. The pack includes an 11" x 34" four-color Gamesmaster's screen and a 96-page book of blank environ, world and star system logs. Aside from putting the commonly used charts and tables right in front of the GM, the screen includes a few new summaries that increase its utility. The Skill Summary takes up an entire panel of the screen and lists in brief the use, related equipment, and Experience Point die rolls for every skill in the GM Guide. The Movement Rate Calculation Summary gives quick equations for figuring character and vehicle movement rates. The Base Repair Time Summary lists the hours required to repair different equipment types (some of these were inadvertently omitted from the GM Guide). It should be noted that in the book of world logs, size 8 and 9 worlds are printed so that each is on one 11" x 17" sheet of paper. The book should be taken apart to use these large logs.

Star Trader

Nick Karp designed *Star Trader* over the summer but was unable to finish it before returning to Princeton. Since I designed *Universe*, and *Star Trader* draws on the *Universe* background, the completion of the project fell in my lap (mainly work on the rules, the system displays and the countermeat). I think the game's best use in *Universe* is as an economic record for the GM's systems. A *Star*

Trader system display can be filled out and attached to the *Universe* system log. If a system has more than one economically active world, a separate *Star Trader* display can be used for each planet (keep in mind that prices of goods on worlds in the same system will not vary nearly as much as prices in different systems). The News Chit system is an excellent adventure and encounter generator, even if the characters in the GM's campaign are not merchants. The players may be hired by a corporation to find or take advantage of the information on a chit. *Universe* characters will rarely be in the financial position to run a corporation like those in *Star Trader*, but may certainly get caught in the middle of all the wheeling and dealing.

First Contact:

Three Star-Faring Alien Races

Our first *Universe* supplement is in the late stages of development now. Greg Costikyan contributed a long essay and character generation system for the Sh'tik'ip (see the Designer's Notes in this issue). I am now completing information on their spaceships and technology. Ted Woods created the Aleri, a clan-oriented race of intelligent carnivores, in which characters can also be generated. Bob Kern is preparing the manuscript for publication. I am also working on a symbiotic, xenophobic race (called the Sarkers by humans). Greg Gerrold and Steve Gray are working on a full-length adventure that sends the players to a system beyond explored space where they encounter a spaceship of unknown origin (but not for long). A number of new skills and professions for human and non-human characters created by David Spangler will be included. An extensive chronology of events will present a background for interaction between the Federation and all the races and also provides the GM with dozens of adventure ideas. The book will be 64 pages long with lots of illustrations and will come with a 22" x 17" stellar display showing Federation space and the domains of all three alien races.

Adventures

The *Devil's Eye* mini-adventure originally slated for this issue (see Designer's Notes in *Ares 10*) has been delayed to issue 14; not because it won't be ready, but there is a glut of material ahead of *Devil's Eye* that the editors want to see published. More *Universe* mini-adventures will be appearing in every other issue of *Ares* (alternating with *DragonQuest* adventures). The big news is that we will be publishing a trilogy of full-length *Universe* adventures in June '82. This 64 to 72-page book will contain three independent adventures for a GM and three to seven players. We are also negotiating with outside role-playing companies to produce *Universe* adventures under our editorial guidance. ■■