UNIVERSE Commlink

A Regular Feature for *Universe*™ Players

by John Butterfield

(**Ed. Note:** The *Universe* game supplement, *First Contacts,* mentioned in this column is scheduled to be published by TSR in the spring of 1983. Further in the future will be a 64-page adventure trilogy, designed by Nick Karp, David Spangler, Greg Gerold and Bob Kern. David's piece is especially interesting in that it is designed for use by any number of players *without* a GM; the players refer to paragraphs and tables in the rules to determine encounters and their outcomes.)

One question asked by many *Universe* game players was succinctly posed in a letter. **Tim Osborne** writes: I'm having a real problem understanding the logic behind the Character Heritage Table. If a Potential Multiplier of 4 is exceptional, then why is the sum of Potential Multipliers of 12 or more only given 2 Study Points instead of 6? It would seem that a person that had a higher intellect, social background, etc., would get more, not less, Study Points...Should not the Study Points be reversed so that 12 or more Potential Multiplier points equals 6 and 4 or less equals 2?

This anomaly struck many people as odd. The reason I designed Potentials and Study Points this way is to create a balance between characters. A character with low Potentials and lots of Study Points will end up with many average characteristics and familiarity with many skills. A character with high Potentials and few Study Points will receive a few very high characteristics and expertise in a few skills. The rationale of Tim's argument makes sense, but if I did it his way, good characters would be determined by their Potential rolls and not by player decision. My rationale is that a youth showing potential in a specific area will be directed toward studies in that area at the expense of other fields.

I have received some letters and have seen a few reviews complaining about the fact that skills made available to a character through his fields of study may only be taken with initial Skill Points. Wrong! Step 12 of the Character Generation Sequence and Case 7.6 state that a character may expend Professional Skill Points to gain or improve skills listed in his fields of study, in addition to those listed under his profession. Furthermore, he is considered *familiar* with *all* those skills (each such skill is marked with an **X** on the Character Record.

The *First Contacts* supplement will contain a number of new professions and skills for characters in the game. The most important of these is *Perception,* a skill that every character and NPC possesses. I recommend the immediate addition of this skill to all character records.

PERCEPTION

9 Levels/No Characteristic Limit

Perception is a measure of the character's intuition developed as a result of his adventuring experience. It is used during play to determine if a character notices a detail about a situation, sees something in the distance, hears a footfall, etc.

Every character automatically possesses the Perception skill when generated. All human characters initially possess this skill at level 2. No initial Skill Points or Professional Skill Points need be spent to acquire the skill, nor may the skill be improved by expenditure of such points. Perception may be improved during play by amassing Perception Experience Points. Perception is used in play in either of two ways:

1. If the GM wishes to allow the character a chance to notice something not readily apparent that is related purely to the senses (sight, hearing, smell, etc.), he instructs the character to conduct a *Perception Check* by rolling *one* die. If the die result is equal to or less than the character's Perception level, the GM informs him of the occurrence or item. If the die result is greater than the character's Perception level, the GM does not provide any information.

2. If the GM wishes to allow a character a chance to notice something related to a particular area of expertise, he instructs the character to conduct a Perception Check by rolling *percentile dice*. The chance of success equals 10% *plus* the character's Perception level *plus* the level he has with the skill associated with the item or event. The *higher* of these two levels is *squared before adding.* **Example:** A skimmer is flying by the character at the edge of view. He has Perception 3 and Air Vehicles 5, so he has a 38% chance ($10 + 5^2 + 3$) of noticing the vehicle and correctly identifying it as a skimmer. Any one of many different skills may be associated with a Perception Check; the most common would be a scientific, technical, environ, or vehicle skill. However, any skill might apply, depending on the situation.

A character who rolls a one on either die when conducting a Perception Check receives one Perception Experience Point.

Universe NPC Record

The *Universe* Character Record was designed for continued use by a player with an evolving character. As a GM, however, I desire a more compact form for keeping records of Non-Player Characters. Inspired by Gerry Klug's NPC cards for the *DragonQuest*™ game (see *Ares* magazine number 11), I now use a similar card system for the NPC's in the *Universe* game. The example printed on this page can be reproduced on 3"×5" index cards (on the unlined side). The cards can be kept in a file for easy reference. On the back of each card, I include notes about the NPC's location (especially if he is the owner of a store, service, or spaceship) and his history and goals, as applicable to my campaign.

All characteristics are abbreviated as on the Character Record. (**Key: ST** is Strength; **EN** is Endurance; **DX** is Dexterity; **AY** is Agility; **IN** is Intelligence; **MP** is Mental Power; **LD** is Leadership; **EM** is Empathy; **AG** is Aggression. Modifications to the first four Physical Characteristics are written to the right of the slash. The other characteristics are self-evident.) To save room on the card, only the Environ and Gravity type with the highest skill levels are listed. All other levels would be extrapolated from these if the NPC wandered from his environ (see 5.4 of the Gamemaster's Guide). Note that the new Perception skill is included. If the NPC has many skills, I use the back of the card to list the excess.■■

Name_____ Profession_____

Age_____ Sex_____ Soc. Standing_____

ST___/___ EN___/___ DX___/___ AY___/___ IN_____ MP_____

LD_____ EM_____ AG_____ Perception_____ Temp_____ Urban_____

Home Environ_____ Level_____ Gravity_____ Level_____

Skills (Level)	Money and Possessions

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