Designer's Notes

Universe Supplement/Adventure #1: First Contact.

As of this writing, *Universe* is just going into the art department, yet we are already in the concept stage for the project's first supplement. The 64-page book will include:

- A detailed study of *three* entirely unique, intelligent alien races, with rules for generating characters and NPC's in each.
- An adventure that sends the characters to the source of mysterious radio signals. The GM may use any of the above races as the power behind the transmissions, and may use the others as races that the primary civilization knows of; thus creating a star-spanning multi-racial empire just beyond the bounds of the human federation.
- New professions and skills for *Universe* characters. Special attention will be paid to anthropological, psychological and mystical areas, as they apoly to contact with alien intelligence.
- New equipment derived from alien technology and experimental work by the federation.

John H. Butterfield

Universe Mini-Adventure #1: The Devil's Eye

Devil's Eye Horror Revealed!

SIDEWINDER (FP) - Survivors of the Devil's Eye (GLY-1) exploration party today described the tragic events of their visit last week to the unsettled planet during a press conference in Sidewinder Spaceport. Expedition leader George Bjorling told of the deaths of three members of the five-man team. Originally scheduled to conduct a low-orbit mapping of the planet only, the party decided to land the ship, the *Kalingrad,* in the heavily vegetated north polar region of Devil's Eye. There they set out for a quick survey of the multitude of life forms picked up by their scanners.

"I made a poor command decision," admitted Bjorling. "We were not properly equipped for that type of exploration having no weapons more effective than an old-fashioned laser pistol." Bjorling went on to say that they encountered "a fierce and deadly collection of creatures composed of organic and metallic mechanical parts. We found two or three versions of some creatures...One would be purely mammalian and docile while the same type of animal with a new steel-hard skin would attack ruthlessly. We lost Barnes, Williams and Lawson to seemingly docile creatures that ripped open their expedition suits with blade-like fangs and claws."

After the conference, Bjorling and his surviving crew member, Grace Bickers, went into seclusion in a GamLepCo retreat at an undisclosed location on Sidewinder.

The preceding is a newspaper bulletin that the players in our first *Universe* mini-adventure receive at the beginning of play. The adventure was originally conceived solely for use at *Origins '81* but has proven so popular with playtesters that we are preparing it for inclusion in an upcoming issue of *Ares*.

The adventure sends a party of adventurers to Devil's Eye in the Gamma Leporis double-star system (27 light years from Sol) to investigate the strange life-forms reported by George Bjorling. With an amphibian all terrain vehicle and an excellent array of weapons, the party is better equipped than their predecessors to deal with the dangerous creatures in the jungles of Barnes River. The party must not only overcome the harsh environment, but must also discover the secrets behind the metallic life-forms. Look for this adventure in *Ares* 11 or 12.

John H. Butterfield

Aries 10, 1981

First Contacts

Some time ago we decided to make *First Contacts* the first supplement to *Universe*, SPI's science fiction role-playing game. *First Contacts*, naturally, will contain aliens: three complete alien races, to be precise. I'm designing one and the other two are being designed by John Butterfield, the designer of *Universe*, and Ted Woods, a co-developer of *DragonQuest*. The entire project will be overseen by John.

While John and Ted are still tied up with other work, I've begun work on my race and, in fact, have most of the first draft done. The race is known as the sht'kl'p (pronounced "shtiklip"); they speak not via vocal cords, instead having a membranous drum-like arrangement which sounds like timpani and snare drums.

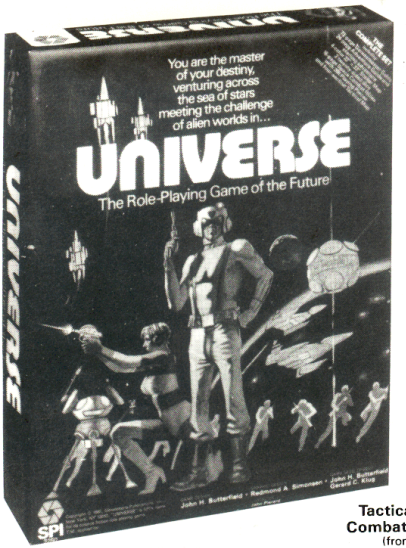
The sht'kl'p are a race of shape-changers. They do have bones and can rearrange the postions of bones only to a limited degree; thus, for example, they can only take on shapes with four limbs since they have four limbs. Additionally, mass is, of course, conserved. Though they are limited shape-changers (as, indeed, is almost all life on their home planet), their primary survival trait is intelligence. On the home planet there are

innumerable creatures better suited to shape-changing than the sht'kl'p — some of whom are extremely dangerous predators. Consequently, sht'kl'p are necessarily a neat people. They keep everything in a precise location and use their eidetic memories to memorize the exact place for every object in their homes. If a sht'kl'p enters his room, for example, and finds that his armchair has moved, he has good reason to suspect that the armchair is actually a predator about to eat him. Consequently, the instinctual reaction of a sht'kl'p in such a situation is to pull out his laser-pistol and blow away the predator — or armchair.

Consequently, the most notable mental characteristic of the sht'kl'p is their compulsive neatness, a trait which human characters will probably find exasperating.

The sht'kl'p character generation system is similar to that for human characters, but is designed to reflect their all-pervading bureaucracy and social system and, of course, describes how shape-changing abilities are used in play. Skills and professions available only to the sht'kl'p and a guide to their technology and asthetics will allow the GM and players to get into the alien mindset.

The other two alien races have been handed in to John for final review, but in any case I will leave it to John and Ted to describe them in future issues. Suffice it to say that Ted plans a race of lupine carnivores with strong family ties, while John is concentrating on a race of symbionts. *Greg Costikyan*



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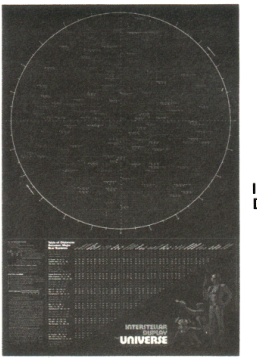

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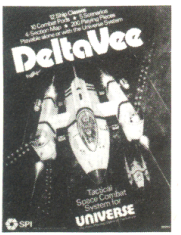

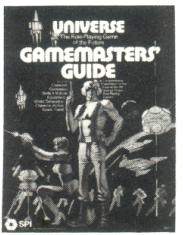

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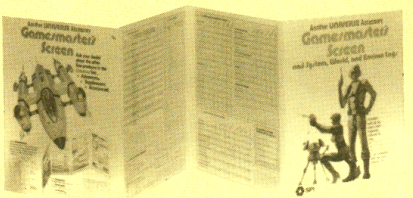

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Coming soon: *Universe* Adventure #1 ***First Contacts***