THE STARFORCE TAPES:  
A Three Way Discussion of the Design and Rationale of StarForce

The following is an abstract of portions of a three hour discussion of StarForce and related science fiction topics. The participants are: JOHN BOARDMAN, StarForce Technical Advisor (and well-known Diplomacy maven, SF fan, and science professor); NEIL SHAPIRO, professional science fiction writer; and REDMOND SIMONSEN, designer of StarForce and holder of other titles at SPI.

Redmond: One thing I just want to outline is the objectives that I had in mind when I did StarForce (since it was the first game that I totally designed. I assisted on a lot of games; this is the first one I was flying on my own). I was really trying to do science fiction in a game form, but first I had to decide what type of mechanics I wanted to have operating in the game. I superimposed upon that an elaborate rationale that I wrote as a little science fiction story. Both things modified each other, of course. There were things that were injected into the rationale because of the game mechanics and there were things injected into the game mechanics, after the fact, because of the rationale. After a while it became a synergistic system where one thing reinforced the other, but, in all honesty, I must say — the basic mechanics came first.

The biggest problem I had was making the game meaningful in astronomical terms. I just didn’t want to “pipe” the whole thing. I knew through science fiction fandom, was involved in the same sort of thing. The only difference was that his chart used Cartesian coordinates and mine used polar coordinates. We pooled our efforts and, after George died, his widow turned over the material to me and I passed it on to Redmond, who found the Cartesian coordinates system more convenient for the purposes of map design.

Neil: I mentioned to John, Redmond, that I think that you and he have created not only a really fine game map, but a unique reference material which I actually found myself using a few times for writing stories. You can pick up just about any Norton Star Atlas to find out how far one star is from the sun. But if you already have your hero on star B and you want to get him to star C and then star F, you want the time more or less in transit to be relative to each other and correct, and for somebody with my poor background in mathematics, it has always been a hellish task to figure out. But now I just pull out my StarForce map and use it as a model and there it is. The entire universe on a piece of paper. Or at least the entire universe within a certain distance...

John: Twenty light years.

Redmond: Well, speaking of that point, the reason that I chose that particular scale was, first of all, it was kind of obvious that one light year to a hexagon is nice and neat and it’s easy to explain what a light year is and relate that to a hexagon. At first I thought I might do it in parsecs, but the figures that John was able to easily turn over to me just about encompassed the area the map encompasses now (a little more actually, a certain scale that, five hundred years from now, I interact on Earth with somebody in...

Redmond: To a large extent, yes.

John: Looking at the past, you can say that the watermill produced the feudal lord and the steam engine produced the capitalist.

Redmond: I did pay some attention to that inasmuch as from the very outset, if I scale the thing so that the map is roughly forty light years across and forty light years deep and there are about seventy-four star systems on the map ... you’re going to have a society strung all over those star systems or a good part of them, and they’re going to be able to interact in a meaningful way and have conflict. You’ve got to squeeze the time down to a point where it is no more than “continental” as we experience it today, so that I interact with somebody in Europe on the same scale that, five hundred years from now, I interact on Earth with somebody in...

Neil: In other words, you can’t have thousand-year Game-Turns.

Redmond: Right! You can’t even have three or four year Game-Turns as you go by Einsteinian physics from one star to the next. Just too long for human scale to operate effectively in terms of conflict.

John: In order to have a game at all, you have to suspend disbelief to the point where travel faster than light is possible and presumably the time scale is the same for everybody.

Redmond: Yes, and I got around the whole business, of course, by not only positing faster than light speed, but actually no time at all lapsing between the literal transfer from one place to another. The discontinuity window effect. Now, that can be looked upon as a grand cop-out, but I felt that the thing that was desired dictated the terms of the scale. You had to have some device whereby people hopped about with as much ease as you fly to Australia today. So why not? Or why not a psionically induced effect that allows you to bridge space?

...Well, I envisioned a social trauma occuring after the so-called White War that I just
briefly mentioned in the background. Something, a sort of exaggerated effect similar to what happened during the Thirty Years War. Everybody was so sick and tired of everything that it had a pacifying effect and I’m sort of 51% an optimist and so assumed that, given enough time and gross enough experiences, society as a whole could actually learn something. The society I am positing starts out as really stable, humanistic and fairly well organized. The same sort of problems we experience today, rapid changes, people being under pressure, but they have more tools to deal with them. They have intelligent machines, for one thing, and they have almost unlimited energy in a usable sense, because they have — well, I talk about an effect that I call gravity sleds. Gravity sleds are [an intimation of the] systems of energy handling that this society has. They can manipulate star systems. That's a huge difference on the fabric of the basic society and that creates the occasions for conflict, not anything inherent in the society as it started out. Basically the wars are, except for the final scenarios, the Xenophobes, pretty pacific. Nobody really gets badly hurt. The techniques used to fight are virtually bloodless. It’s more by accident that anybody gets killed.

**John:** A great, destructive war, like the Thirty Years War, would create a trauma and in the...

**Redmond:** Well, the Earth that I started out with is a unified governmental system that developed during the aftermath of the White War and so you had no national-state business going on where you had separate political entities bitting on each other when economic and social realities press upon them. So you could stipulate that, given hundreds of years of unified planetary government and a great deal of energy to dispose of as you wish, you could eliminate a lot of the frictions that cause upheavals and revolutions.

**Neil:** I have to be a little pessimistic about that. The only problem for me to suspend disbelief in StarForce is what we are talking about here. I think that this war would have some lasting effects: perhaps it would last right through 2451 A.D. with the L'Chal-Dah contact. I can see an entire human race thinking, we’re all brothers and sisters under the skin and not fighting, but having these psychic arguments over certain political points, which are what most scenarios are. But I just have this feeling that when they finally do make contact, unless humankind changes completely, from the genes out, this brother/sister relationship will not extend to something that doesn’t look like a human. Especially in this scenario where the L’Chal-Dah attack first; this would definitely bring out some xenophobia.

**Redmond:** I think you have an argument there inasmuch as the first contact with an alien race who acts aggressively would wake the beast in human beings. The moderating effect is the Telesthetics themselves. Since the Telesthetics are all linked together in a guild stronger than any guild you ever saw in your life.

**Neil:** Do you stipulate that the Telesthetics occupy the decision-making offices of government?

**Redmond:** Yes. They almost totally control the government because they are the life blood of intercourse between the stars... without them the governments are isolated on their own planetary bases and so, if they want to have anything happening at all in an interstellar fashion, they've got to play ball with Telesthetics... One of the things that contributes to the solidarity of the Telesthetics if the fact that they are telepathically linked. So they all can perceive each other's emotions in a way no normal human being can perceive. Telesthetics are empathically linked and they also have to train new Telesthetics — only a Telesthetic can train a Telesthetic. They are a sort of non-political entities, although they do have some tie, of course, to their planets of origin and have some loyalty economically to organizations that employ them.

**Neil:** Did you consider a scenario where, at the end, the Player is losing he can say, "Well, all right" (sort of like Adolf Hitler and the bomb) and shoot down one of the Telesthetic vessels down from orbit?

**Redmond:** The way I avoided the Armegeddon syndrome is to make a planet subduable from space (once you get by the StarGate that protects that planetary system) using the so-called Heissen effect that I outlined in the background. That's a means by which you can manipulate telesthetic power close to a planet to put everybody to sleep. You make a landing and, as a matter of course, "defang" the planetary armaments and the army organizations and so forth.

**Neil:** But as long as the StarGate...

**Redmond:** As long as the StarGate shields the planetary system you can't do it because... I make reference to the fact that you stand off the planet for a considerable amount of time and devote all your attention to creating the field so if you had a StarGate at your back you'd get whumped if you tried to do that. I made the Starships or TeleShips merchantmen because then everything depends on them. They are not only the battlefield they are the merchants and you cannot strip your entire merchant marine to fight a war. That's why the force levels in the game are relatively low even though you are talking about billions and billions of people. Dozens and dozens of planets funding and manning a war. You wind up with thirty or forty StarShips participating in a war. It's because they are the merchant marine; you cannot take all of the merchant marine and throw it into the war. Even if it's a very short war. I wanted to do that because I didn't want to have game mechanics that required you to manipulate (in three dimensions) seventy-three ships. You would get a big headache trying to do something like that.

**John:** We have an economic basis for the wars, control of trade in items which can only be produced in a few places.

**Redmond:** Also the primary resource of interaction — the TeleShips themselves and the crew. As you control population politically, then you control the base from which you draw your Telesthetics.

**Neil:** I just wondered, though, if you stipulate that perhaps one planet or another does have some agricultural item or some hard goods produced by some means that can't be duplicated somewhere else. If you're not opening a possible scenario for actual territorial expansion to take over that planet, instead of bothering with the merchant marine and economics, just take what you want and then I think you would get into a bloodier conflict.

**Redmond:** Well, "take what you want" in what sense? The Solar government is being told by the government of Alpha Centauri that we don't want to suffer under your aegis anymore; we want to be independent. We want to control our own economy. Let's say we produce commodity Z that you need. Now why doesn't Solar government turn around and say, "Well, if you do that, we are just going to come out and step on your neck. Totally devastate your planet." The reason it doesn't happen is simply because the techniques exist to subdue a planet in a bloodless fashion... I had running through my mind when I worked out the scenarios, in the general way things were going, that the modifier was the Telesthetics themselves. The Telesthetics never grew very far away from each other simply because they are the main means of interstellar communications, both in terms of delivery of merchandise and also in the delivery of symbols, that they are the radio. Through them one planet talks to another... and tells each other to go to hell, for that matter. So if you want to do anything you've got to do it with the consent of the group of Telesthetics that you nominally control. You don't totally control them. They're independent enough so that you couldn't say to a band of Telesthetics based on Alpha Centauri, "Well, go take this conversion trigger and plant it in Sol and wipe out the home planet." They're not Hitlers or anything like that. They're sophisticated people that have a very good idea of their own worth and they're willing to play ball with the planetary government... up to a point, but if it goes too far, they'll say "time."

**Neil:** So they are the limiting factor.

**Redmond:** So they are the limiting factor to the bloodiness of the wars. I didn’t want to have a game in which the technology existed to blow up planets, the race, every sign of life on the planet and turn it into a cinder and so, if that technology exists, you have to have some mechanism in your scenario — the overall society — that stops you from doing that. Now, today we have the balance of terror, but I didn’t want to have just the balance of terror.
Neil: Perhaps you can describe it as the "balance of friendship," at least the Teletheistics.

Redmond: Yes, although it's partly the balance of terror inasmuch as almost every planetary society has the means to explode a super-H-bomb, conversion trigger on a star and fry everything on the planets orbiting that star. More importantly it's the Teletheistics themselves that say, "Well, we're just not going to do that at all." That forced me to posit the Heissen effect, so that you could have planetary assaults without that last-gasp-Hitler-in-the-redoubt syndrome: "If I can't win, nobody can win." Because you can just zoom in on a planet and create a field and everybody...

Neil: One question here. It occurs to me that they should be destroying ships rather than randomizing them.

Redmond: The reason that happens is that the only effective means of dealing with TeleShips at the distances in which you engage is the use of telesthetic ability. That randomization — that is the displacement of ships rather than the destruction of them — it's not because they don't want to destroy them; it's because that's the only means that they have at their disposal to affect ships at that distance. So, in other words, if they can get close enough they can use normal Einsteinian physics to whomp a ship, but they can't get close enough. If you try to come within range, within 100,000 miles, of an enemy TeleShip without using any telesthetic ability, and attempt to sink a high velocity missile into it... there's not going to be much of a chance of using anything that is analogous to current-day technology to actually destroy a ship. You'll notice that in the background I gave for the Xenophobe scenario that there was actually destruction of ships when we went on a punitive expedition into Xenophobe territory, but the techniques described and the time that it took and the cost to the race were enormous. In relationship to the time scale, the society normally operates in conflict. It took 1.7 years to wind-up the punitive expedition. What they were doing, they were using adhoc techniques to destroy ships: low energy approaches to StarGates (in other words, suicide teams), running in with bombs strapped to their backs, practically, and destroying it outright. Neil: Like you say, the cost in PSL life of 3.7 million battle deaths and twenty-one TeleShips destroyed, which I guess would be quite a chunk.

Redmond: Yes. Since Teletheistics are rare and TeleShips expensive and the Gnostechs themselves are expensive in many ways. They are expensive in hard terms and also inasmuch as the Gnostechs are complicated intelligent machines, which, just like a human, gain experience and grow. That's why they have to be "initiated." They have to be initiated with Teletheistics that would be operating them.

John: Something like the Canine Corps.

Redmond: Something like that, except the relationship is more equal. The Gnostechs are, in effect, identities. They are "persons" and they have their own motivations and their own realities.

Neil: I suppose this could be a limiting factor too, as far as the blood conflict goes. If the Gnostechs saw other Gnostechs being bumped off, they might just decide not to help the aggressor ship.

Redmond: Also, you can assume that they are imminently practical inasmuch as they don't have an endocrine gland system to get them all worked up over one thing or another... Well, there's any number of things that I posited or imagined, plus you can simply assume that there are other factors operating that prevent the sort of rip 'em-out-tooth-and-nail battles that humankind is used to.

John: Did you ever consider making the Xenophone scenario a solitaire, with the Xenophone actions programmed much the same way as the Japanese actions are in Operation Olympic.

Redmond: I did, and the only thing that prevented me from doing it was time. I did put a simple solitaire system in there in order to help people learn the game... that business of the rescue mission... and I wanted to go further with the solitaire game, but I just didn't have the time. When I first started out doing the game, I was aware of the existence of three or four other science fiction games done by semi-amateur organizations. I deliberately avoided looking at any of those. That was just a deliberate nonliteral way of writing limited intelligence and yet be unaware of how "deep" they were in this "real" world (that I'm inventing) that you literally knew the XY and didn't know the Z. That's just the means of representing the lack of total accuracy in ascertaining an enemy position. You can simply assume that, in the real five-hundred-years-in-the-future, when they have telesthetic ships zooming around, that it will be true three-dimensional inaccuracy in discovering positions of the enemy ship.

Neil: I'd really like to see this game plotted so that a computer — a video screen computer...

John: There are computer operated wargames.

Redmond: There is that classic, Space War.

Neil: Of course, that only takes place around one sun...

Redmond: And two-dimensionally, at that.

Neil: ...I think this game could be programmed.

Redmond: In fact, if any game can be said to have had any influence at all upon this game, it is that computer game. Inasmuch as in that computer program there's a limitation on the disappearance of your ship off the screen. That is to say, when you disappear off the screen in one direction, you come back on an equivalent point on the other side of the screen. I like that concept that you could go totally off the map and I wanted to get away from the wargame concept where if you were forced off the map you were destroyed. After all, you are talking about three-dimensional space, for all intents and purposes limitless, so I base the game mechanics of when you randomize (and your ship is randomly displaced somplace in the sphere) upon sort of a "rebound" effect, that the Teletheistics who were in that ship would produce. That, even though their ship was randomized and shot off to God knows where, their own sense of "actuality" in the space they knew rebounds them into "known" space somewhere.

John: The same problem is faced in a lot of games that are played on just ordinary two-dimensional maps and the fighting gets a little close to the edge... what do you do? Do you say that anything thrown off the edge is eliminated or escapes or that the move simply isn't valid.

Neil: There is one science fiction game in particular where I think that is the major drawback; it's done through an inertia system of movement.

Redmond: Triplanetary...

Neil: Only a two-dimensional plane in the first place and then it reaches the end of the
map and I don’t know, God grabs it out of the universe or something.

**John:** There’s a feature like that in 4,000 A.D., too. If you run your ship too far up the warp side of the board, it’ll never come back.

**Redmond:** Incidentally, speaking of *Triplanetary*, a moment, that takes place within a solar system... in fact, within a limited segment of the solar system.

**Neil:** One thing that they do have, just to say a good thing about *Triplanetary*, movement around the gravity wells. You can get a slingshot effect on spaceships.

**Redmond:** That’s the best thing about the game, that’s to say, its use of vectors to influence movement. In fact it is basically a movement system game. You make these advance decisions and you’re subject to them and they are subject to the positions of the masses that are on the map.

**Neil:** It occurs to me that once I would like to try transferring that to *StarForce* on the *StarForce* map.

**Redmond:** It would be, I hate to use the word, “unrealistic,” given the background for the movement system and the scale that you’re talking about.

**John:** If you do a strategic level game in the solar system, a plane board does become realistic, because planets are very nearly on the same plane. This was done in a game that was never brought into commercial production. Its inventor brought it to the Chicago World Science Fiction Convention in ’62; it was called *Interplanetary*. The map board was the solar system and each planet moved a certain distance in each Game-Turn in its orbit around the sun, representing the passage of time. It was different, of course, with each planet. The ships themselves moved in various orbits and there was also a dark planet, which is sort of a mobile black hole, that might grab you if you weren’t careful. The point of the game was for several Players to try to get from Earth out to Pluto, pick up something valuable there, I think it was a drug of some sort, and bring it back to Earth safely, without being hijacked by the other Players.

**Redmond:** There’s a mission like that in *Triplanetary*. The thing I didn’t like about *Triplanetary* I discovered after I had *StarForce* down the ways and into the water... The movement system was one of the nicest things about the game, yet it was clumsy to handle; you were plotting with a grease pencil on acetate... I just had a bad sense about doing all that and doing it with a grease pencil and getting so involved in that movement system that you lost sight of almost everything else.

**Neil:** That’s true. Once two ships are fairly close together, if there’s a torpedo involved or a mine or one of these things that use the grease pencil, courses start overlapping and you wind up with a grease pencil line an inch wide and you can’t tell were anything is.

**Redmond:** Plus the fact that the rules were not written in such a way that you would immediately grasp what was going on and deal with this fairly complicated process with facility. Relating it to *StarForce*, one of the things I realized as I was midway into it, it was a very different kind of game for a wargamer, or for anybody. It was a game that had a lot of inherent complexity in the system and so I felt that it was a real pressure on me to make the rules as explicit — as all encompassing — as possible. That’s one of the reasons why I went to the glossary, introducing each of the two main sections of the rules. Apparently, it’s worked pretty effectively, because we’ve gotten very few questions on *StarForce*. Usually a new game, particularly if it’s complicated, you get a pretty juicy wave of question letters in the first few months. *StarForce* has gotten less than half of the number we usually get... and the rules are twenty-four pages long. The rules themselves are divided into two parts. The Standard Strategic Game and the Tactical Advanced Game. The main body of the rules in the Standard Strategic Game are no more than eight pages in terms of real rules and, once you grasp the three-dimensionality of the map, you’ve got the Standard Game knocked. Once you get by that main hump of unfamiliarity in dealing in true three dimensions... one of the things you mentioned before that you really liked in a game. Part of my insistence in having literal three dimensionality grew out of my dissatisfaction with the air games that were done in which the three dimensionality was compromised to a large degree, although I owe something of a debt to the technique used in the air games inasmuch as in the air games you have different levels, using different counters to represent different levels. Although I didn’t use counters to represent different levels, I did make use of that concept of a couple of dozen levels to be at.

**John:** In the game development did you ever consider putting a peg on each fleet to tell what its Z coordinate was so that the Players could know a little more precisely the positions and seeing what effect that would have on the game.

**Redmond:** That relates to what I just said about the air games. In the air games, you have different counters to represent a single aircraft at a different altitude. At first, I thought it might be possible to do that, to have either Z coordinate markers or have that system of replacing the ship each time. Because of the space I wanted to represent in the way that I wanted to represent it, it would have meant an enormous overblown counter mix and a lot of unnecessary complications. Unlike the air games, it is a simultaneous game. You have the plot in front of you, the plot is pretty simple in the stellar map. Just the hex coordinate and the Z level that you’re at, so I thought that it was simple enough for a Player to reference to and plus the fact that you usually don’t have more than six or a dozen counters to manipulate. It’s not that much of a strain on a guy’s brain to get the feeling of where those six ships are. So I was relieved from that trap of having all those counters there.

**Neil:** One thing about the game, and that is to me I think that it is more realistic than any of your other SPI games, much as I enjoy playing them. I think this is because of the unfamiliarity of the game when I’m playing *Civil War* or *Sins* I am moving little cardboard counters on a cardboard map... and I know it’s entirely symbolic. There’s no way I can be fooled for an instant into thinking to myself that I am actually doing this. But when you play *StarForce* it’s a nice black map with stars, so when you sit there visualizing it in three dimensions, I can actually see that map as a sphere and it’s almost as if in your mind you have a holographic projection of a battle being fought outside your starship.

**Redmond:** It’s interesting that you should say holographic projection, because that, in effect, is what I was thinking of when I visualized the map to myself. I wanted to use the gradation of color and the black background of the map and the Z coordinate business to give you that sense.

**Neil:** I think that if there are ever star battles fought, something like this is going to be used. Of course, it won’t be a sheet, it would be a hologram and it won’t cover this vast volume. But still, I think this is why it’s realistic.
John: They may be so far away from us in either technological direction that combat is unthinkable. The stronger side just moves in and declares what it wants and there's no argument.

Redmond: It may be something really different...

Neil: Let us postulate through some natural selection (or perhaps unnatural selection) that the population, instead of producing .001% Telesthetics, which is probably too much anyway, is able to produce 20% Telesthetics.

John: There would be a basic change in the character of the society.

Neil: Also it would be a basic change, but it appears to me that these Telesthetics with a bit more trade could probably develop individual telekinetic powers — telekineses and the ability to move.

John: Furthermore, 20% Telesthetics which would be regarded by the nonTelesthetics majority not as a resource, but as a menace.

Redmond: Well, perhaps. Incidentally, the mix of powers that the Telesthetics have — they're called Telesthetics because that's their predominant power: sensing things at a distance; another name for that is clairvoyance. They are telekinetic as well, not as powerfully as they are telesthetic, and they are telepathic, but again, not as powerfully as they are telesthetic.

Neil: I think what I'm basically saying here is just using the old StarForce system to come up with something which should be nothing at all like you made it. Suppose there was a race not only of Telesthetics, but also of analogs of the Gnostechs, only they're a sub-species. This from the very first entry into intelligent life of these two combined races would mean that they would not have to develop nearly all the technology that we have, in order to be starfarers and in order to fulfill all their needs and comforts...

Redmond: I tend to think that there would be an enormous diversity. However, I think there are common points that all starfaring races would achieve. They would have something in common. They would find that this is the best way to do a given thing. If I'm going to get into space and go between stars I'm going to do it this way. In fact, I postulate that the teleships themselves, being the optimum design, are the only types of ships built. They don't have “destroyers” or big “battleships” simply because of the constraints of the technology. It's convergent technology. A technological revolution where you have an optimum design and you better use that design because if you use anything else, you're going to be wasting resources.

Neil: You stipulate that a Telesthetic from one race has the same magnitude of powers as a Telesthetic from another race.

John: That is a bit stickier. I could be quite willing to extend Redmond's idea to the whole level of technology from the invention of fire on up and to base my belief on general technological parallelism among different intelligent species on that. But, of course, there might be basic differences in anything from strength to stature to telesthetic ability which might have something to...

Redmond: Certainly it would modify the literal design of the ship. The placement of controls, the number of crew you might need to do a particular thing. One Rame Telesthetic might not be equivalent to one human Telesthetic. In fact, I will be willing to state right now that Rame Telesthetics are more powerful than human Telesthetics. Based upon the thing that I posit that almost all Rame are telepathic and since they transfer their identities from one to the other, they have a richer mix of Telesthetics in their race. It's still logical within the game because I gave the Rame a smaller population base. We're not throwing dozens and dozens of starforces into space simply because they have a smaller population base. I look upon Rame as the most level headed of all the races that I depict. They're the most contemplative leaders of the behind the bizarre of their nature. They're just on the borderline of being dolphins in effect. They have that impulse towards technological existence that brings them out into space, but they're not so driven and so totally dependent upon technology as humans are, for instance. Or L'Chal-Dah, which are, in effect, other humans. I had in the back of my mind when I created the L'Chal-Dah that either they were the original humans and we are sort of a forgotten remnant of them or vice versa. Or that we both came from some other place.

John: Well, we're so closely linked biologically with life on this planet that it would be a little hard postulating an extraterrestrial origin for humanity.

Redmond: Well, someone posited that very close linking that we all use the same R&A/D&A basis. It might be an argument in favor of the fact that we had a seed planted on the planet. It all grew from the one root. I'm just saying that enough of a doubt exists because of the striking similarities between the L'Chal-Dah and humans.

Neil: Can they interbreed?

Redmond: Yes, but they produce sterile offspring.

John: Interbreeding among races evolved on different planets is a very touchy point. There was a lot of it in early SF with John Carter of Mars as the type and, biologically, this is just out of the question...

Redmond: You can talk about simple, natural transfer of biological material between planets. There's been such a move that maintains that simply by organic material being naturally thrown off the planet.

Neil: The only thing that bothers me about that in relation to the background of the game looking over all the scenarios, the L'Chal-Dah seem to have less or no more colony worlds than the humans do. Now it seems to me that if the L'Chal-Dah came first, it would probably hit more. They would be the more expansive empire.

John: Well, this, I think, is the assumption that makes the game playable. Say, for example, you have two species even as little on the cosmic time scale as 100 years out of development with each other. That means that one is going to explore space while the other is at a dreadnought level of technology. A hundred years is a hopeless head start at this level, and yet it's a very small period of time on a cosmic time scale.

Redmond: That is a difficulty in any world system that you stipulate.

Neil: I think that, if you're going to stipulate three races at the same level of technology, I don't think you can have one the progenitors of the others.

Redmond: Or, as you brought up yourself, it's possible that it is allowable within a system to say that they were both planted by a third party.

John: As sort of a sociological experiment.

Redmond: See who develops faster under what conditions.

Neil: In that case, one wouldn't be the progenitor of the other.

John: No. They both would have a common progenitor. I think that this business about having them at the same technological level; it's one of the things, like faster than light travel and ESP, that you're going to have to assume if you want a game.

Redmond: If I stipulate a super race coming in with technology hundreds of years in advance of the technology that exists on the map, the game becomes much less interesting... There's one thing you could spin-off from that and that is the development of a single aspect of technology to point of its easy use, such as interstellar travel. That forces you to have under pinnings of that technology that are at the same level. It does not force you to have the exact same technological level throughout the society. You could simply say that they're areas of technology in that the Rame and L'Chal-Dah are either superior or deficient to human technology and vice versa... It's safe to assume that you can have disparities between the cultures even though they might have in common this one major aspect of their technology and might be operating at essentially the same technological level. That can be reinforced by saying that there is one optimum design for a teleship given certain missions that it is going to fulfill and plus the fact that the rarity of Telesthetics and you're going to be using them primarily for commercial means would prevent the proliferation of different types of ships, different roles for different types of ships. That's one thing that I really want to avoid, whole transfer of naval technology into space.
John: It might get a little far away from the game to ask, but the fact that the Telesthetics are all women is likely to introduce some kind of change in the conventional relationships between the sexes.

Redmond: The reason I did that was, I was just having fun, I wanted to stick a pin into the typical wargamer. Most wargamers are male, 99% of them, and I though it would be a little bit of a twist having a wargamer having to deal with command elements that were commanded by women.

John: In the movement features of StarForce there's a point that makes it different from any other wargame. The instantaneous movement means that you can't block strategic routes, or place pieces in particular positions that make up the enemy's movement.

Redmond: Right. In effect, it is a synthesis between the mood of a naval game and an air game and there's very little of the infantry game in it. I had this done deliberately, because I feel that's the way things would be. That the distances involved, the volumes of space involved are such that you couldn't have really that sort of Napoleonic or WWI business where you have a line and you can arrange your forces in such a way that nobody can penetrate them. The only time you come to something you can't go around is the StarGate itself. Because the StarGate is powerful enough to shield the planetary system on the outskirts of which it orbits. So you have to take that. You can't get by it in order to secure the system.

Neil: What I particularly like is the mirror shifting. The overshift which is equivalent to a forced march in a more conventional game, and the idea that you can take this chance and you can wind up just completely opposite, in planar distance and Zulu up-and-down distance.

Redmond: Originally I was going to use almost exclusively mirror shifting or disruption type effects. Then I decided, well, why not have randomization in which you go someplace and you don't know where the hell you're going to wind up. Since there are so many possible places you could be, I though that it would add a certain interest to the game. Ultimately, it took over the combat results in the game in that the Tactical Advanced Game, that's what happens to you. You could be all the way across the map, a dozen Turns away from where you want to be if you use a conventional method of shifting. But with GateLinks and so forth and StarGates in series, going from system to system you can get back reasonably easily...

The rationale behind placement of StarGates is that, for the most part, they're crewed by members of that system and that the system supports the StarGate... I designed the StarGate values and the teleship values — the starforce values — so that you would need at least two StarForces to take a StarGate. If the StarGate is supported by a StarForce, you would probably need more than two StarForces to take that StarGate...

In actuality, the game was designed as the Advanced Game with the two map concept of the Stellar Display and the Tactical Display. After thinking about it for a long, long time (I spent months playing the game in my head without putting very much on paper at all), I sat down in a few days and tapped out a set of rules which are almost these printed rules. Very little modification took place in the development. What happened in the development was the creation of scenarios and the honing down of some aspects of the rules. People began playing it and found an enormous amount of complexity in getting used to it. So that the developer, John Young, suggested that we take the Stellar map and make a "standard game" that revolved around simply moving on the Stellar map and having combat in a more abstract way. Basically (to wrap it up) I'm pleased with the way the game came out, although there are some parts of the system I would modify if I had another whack at it. It hangs together, though, and people that I've spoken with have played it and who have really gotten into it, really like it. They react to it well from a science fiction point of view, which pleases me, because I really was half-way writing a science fiction story as well as designing a game at the same time. • • •