

Capsule Reviews

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THE SPACE GAMER reviews board games, role-playing games, computer games, video games, and game supplements. We review play-by-mail games if a reviewer is enrolled. We will review any science fiction or fantasy game if the publisher supplies a copy. We do not guarantee reviews of historical wargames. TSG may publish a review of a game we are not sent — IF a reader submits a review.

The staff will make reasonable efforts to check reviews for factual accuracy, but opinions expressed by reviewers are not necessarily those of the magazine.

Games for which reviews have been assigned or received include: *The Book of Mars*, *Duel Magical*, *Empire I*, *Heroic Expeditions*, *The House on Hangman's Hill*, *Interstellar Skirmishes*, *Legend of the Sky Raiders*, *Misty Wood*, *Power Play*, *Seldon's Compendium of Starcraft*, *Sorcerer of Siva*, and *The Tower of Indomitable Circumstance*.

Games for which we are currently seeking reviewers include: *Grand Master* and *Space Ace 21*.

FEDERATION SPACE (Task Force); \$14.95. Designed by Stephen G. Wilcox. One 16-page rule/scenario book, 432 die-cut counters, 11" x 17" map, tactical combat display/CRT sheet, five fleet organization charts, two six-sided dice. 2-8 players; playing time 1-2+ hours. Published 1981.

Task Force's long-awaited strategic component to its *Star Fleet Battles* system, is finally at hand. While some may be disappointed by its simplicity, FEDERATION SPACE proves to do quite adequately what its designers intended. The game consists of a strategic map of the area of space surrounding the United Federation of Planets. The map is based on those in the *Star Fleet Technical Manual* and in SFB and, even with some distortions to make the game more playable, is a satisfying

representation. Counters represent most of the ship types introduced in SFB and the first expansion kit, including a few ships from the forthcoming second expansion kit — only the Andromedans are missing. Ships have a movement rating, an attack strength and a defense strength printed on the counter, which abstractly approximate their SFB abilities. Movement is conducted on the map and combat on a tactical display with ships squaring off against each other, similar to that of GDW's *Imperium*. Ten scenarios range from a three-turn Klingon assault on the Tholians to a free-for-all campaign game. For those who find the combat system too simplistic there are also guidelines on linking FEDERATION SPACE with *Star Fleet Battles*.

FEDERATION SPACE plays quite well, with or without the SFB link. It is relatively fast-moving and easy to learn and play, even for those who may have felt SFB itself too complex. Fleet organization restrictions help balance the scenarios by tying up units on certain fronts (can't send all the Fed forces against the Romulans, 'cause those sneaky Klingons may attack from behind).

Problems are generally minor. Some distortions in scale are evident, but these aid playability. A couple rules need clarification — criteria for controlling a system are a bit vague, for example. Combat can be a problem, as a battle can as often be decided by lucky die rolls as by strategy (though the better strategist should prevail in the long run); those bothered by this, however, can and probably will resort to the SFB tie-in.

FEDERATION SPACE succeeds in its purpose to present a relatively simple, playable *Star Trek* game which can serve as a strategic module for *Star Fleet Battles*. Recommended to Trek gamers everywhere.

— William A. Barton

HELLTANK (Metagaming); \$3.95. Designed by Phillip S. Kosnett. Boxed micro: 12½" x 14" color map, 126 die-cut counters, 4" x 7" 28-page rulebook, 7" x 8" play-aid sheet, one die. Two players; playing time 20-90 minutes. Published 1981.

The map shows a city, wooded hills, a canal, and a highway. Players pick a scenario (delaying action, depot evacuation, city attack, recon mission, or helltank breakthrough) and a time period (2005-2040 in seven segments). Points are spent to purchase units, with cost and avail-

ability depending on the year. During turns, players alternate "executing" (moving and attacking) with one unit at a time (a unit can move, fire, then move again). Enemy units can fire at executing units ("opfire"). Combat is ranged, and every unit has a "to hit" number depending on the kind of unit it is firing at. A hit destroys the target. Most units need a line-of-fire to their targets; missiles and guns don't, and fire at every unit in the hex they attack. Basic rules cover the usual sort of weapons, including helicopters and missile-launched minefields. Intermediate rules add multi-turreted tanks that fire three times per turn. Advanced rules add "quake" missiles that attack entire megahexes, and helltanks with six player-chosen weapons and the ability to take damage from hits rather than croaking.

Three cheers for a fresh design! This is NOT a mindless copy of *Ogre*. It is a subtle game — sometimes a scenario will seem hopelessly unbalanced until you chance upon the right tactics. It is both challenging yet swift-playing, and with 25 possible scenario/time period combinations there is plenty of replay value. Metagaming has also done a decent job on the map and counters — they look good, although they aren't the works of art some publishers are putting out.

Now let's talk about the stupid, avoidable flaws. The rules are full of holes. A rules lawyer will cheer, a novice will despair. An experienced player can make the assumptions that seem to be called for but it's unprofessional and a nuisance. Some rules are given only in the examples (but one example contradicts the rules). Then there's playability: you need to keep track of seven facts for each unit, but the rules give you markers and facing requirements for only five facts; the rest you've got to memorize or write down on paper (Has the MTT opfired? How far can the AH still move?). Plus, Metagaming left the IDs off the counters, so there's no way to tell ACs apart even though they have customized individual armament, and you'll have to invent a way to track the firing for multi-weaponed units. Blue terrain isn't defined. (I ignored it.) The line-of-fire rules have a huge flaw involving slopes and cliffs. Examples of play aren't given for the basic game. The counters are hard to read.

In short, HELLTANK got shortchanged somewhere in production. I do like the game, but I can recommend it only for experienced gamers who don't mind second-guessing the rules on a few vital points and who don't mind

doing mental bookkeeping. Too bad — this game *could* have been a contender.

— W. G. Armintrout

SPACE OPERA, 2nd Ed. (FGU); \$18.00. Designed by Edward E. Simbalist, A. Mark Ratner and Phil McGregor. Two 8½" x 11" 90-page rulebooks, four 8½" x 11" cardstock chart and information sheets, boxed. 2 or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

FGU has at last released a corrected 2nd edition of their *Space Opera* SF RPG that helps take the system closer to its claim of being "the most complete science fiction role playing game ever produced." Although approximately 90% of the material in the new edition is the same as in the 1st, the changes made are significant. In addition to the new, more attractive cover (including a Wookiee-like character and a near-topless heroine), improvements include the clearing up of nearly all the annoying typos that plagued the first edition, and a number of clarifications of some of the ambiguous rules.

One of the more notable improvements is the addition of a method for characters to obtain psionic scores of 17, 18 and 19 during initial generation — a serious omission in the 1st edition. Of course, the changes in the 2nd edition don't make SO any less complex. Those who prefer simpler systems won't find it much more accessible than the 1st edition. Also, there are still sections of the rules that are less than clear and must be left to each individual SM to interpret.

Still, for those who liked *Space Opera* originally or for those who thought it had potential but were turned off by the typos, omissions, etc., the 2nd edition is definitely worth having. (Note: An errata sheet is available for those who have the 1st edition and don't want to buy the 2nd, though it does not include typo corrections, just the major changes.)

— William A. Barton

THE SPAWN OF FASHAN (Games of Fashan, POB 182, Norman, OK 73070); \$8.95. Designed by Kirby Lee Davis. 90-page rulebook. 2 or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

Primarily, SPAWN is a lengthy character generation system leading to a complex combat system. Of course there are the usual conventions: movement, magic and encounters. An unusual character advancement system has both "level" increase and improvement of basic statistics.

The piece de resistance is combat. Each character is unique, with basic statistics and individual attributes allowing aimed blows, fatigue effects, parrying, dodging, critical hits, and specific penetration factors for different weapons and armor. There's far greater simulation of melee than most games, with less complication than those games which try to be as realistic, and there are some fascinating new ideas such as a 6th sense capability.

SPAWN could have been superb, but it is ruined by abominable writing and proofreading. It took four readings to figure out the combat rules and I'm still hazy on one or two points. Sections of the rules are mislabelled or left out, and you're referred to tables ostensibly vital to play — which you're then told you are supposed to create yourself. I'm all for creativity, but one buys a game for rules out of which to create; SPAWN requires you to first write rules.

THE SPAWN OF FASHAN is a fascinating set of fantasy combat rules which are trying to become a full role-playing game. Future

planned supplements may allow SPAWN to become the excellent FRPG which the author's enthusiasm and inventiveness have tried to create. However, its current value seems limited to experienced FRPG players who want something novel. Beginners will be baffled, and gamers happy with their current rules will find little reason to journey to the far planet of Fashan.

—Ronald Pehr

SUPPLEMENTS

THE CORSAIRS OF CYTHERA (Ragnarok Enterprises); \$1.50. Designed by Jon Schuller. Adventure for D&D or *Ysgarth Rules Systems*. One 8½" x 5½" 9-page book. 2 or more players; playing time 1½-2 hours. Published 1981.

The Achajaian fleet attacks Carzal, imperial capital of Ilchania, in twelve days! Only timely intervention by THE CORSAIRS OF CYTHERA might save the empire. To earn the lavish reward promised, a half-dozen characters, experience level 4-9, must sail pirate-infested seas, fight monsters, then try to convince the world's toughest pirate that he really wants to be pals.

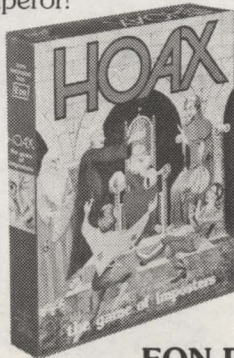
Players who know when to fight, when to run, and when to shuck and jive can have a lot of fun. Good role-playing is a must to handle the varied types of encounters: piracy on the high seas, ferocious beasts on the island, the seamy nightlife in the wild'n'wooly pirate capital, and the delicate, dangerous negotiations with the mighty prince of corsairs. Strong, cunning characters will complete the mission and reap well-earned treasure, others swing from the yardarm or get a quick trip to Davy Jones' locker.

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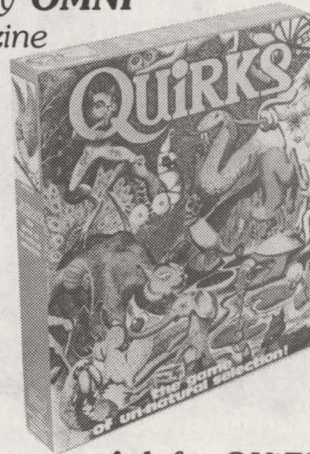
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CHARACTER ROLE PLAYING (Ragnarok Enterprises); \$2.00. Designed by David F. Nalle. One 8½" x 5½" 10-page booklet. Published 1981.

Designated "Mini-System 2," **CHARACTER ROLE PLAYING** is the second in a planned series of game aids from this company. It is a quickie course in creatively role playing the most common fantasy character types. The idea is to invent a character's personality and background, use the persona as a guide to the character's motives and behavior, and give the character a defined place in the fantasy world. No tables, charts, or statistics; this game aid is truly applicable to any game, and useable by player or gamemaster.

CHARACTER ROLE PLAYING is well-written, deserving an "A" for composition and style. The author fully conveys his concept of player-characters as living entities rather than mere collections of dice rolls.

CHARACTER ROLE PLAYING would make a dandy series of articles, or a worthwhile section in a rulebook, but is too limited to stand on its own. Though the small print allows a lot of information per page, it is difficult to read and doesn't make up for the fact that you're paying \$2.00 for only 10 pages.

Experienced role players don't need **CHARACTER ROLE PLAYING**, others won't buy it. Get it for new FRPG players (who don't yet worship the dice), if you can convince them to read and heed.

— Ronald Pehr

DUNGEON FLOORS (Heritage USA); \$4.99. Nine cardboard sheets, uncut, in 4" x 7" cardboard box, 7" x 12" instruction sheet.

Published 1981.

Like other such products, this is a set of cards which can be cut up to provide wood and stone floors, stairways, etc., for your miniatures to "adventure" on. Though printed on a lighter stock than some competing products, these are nicely done, in realistic full color. Depending on how small you cut them, you could get over 100 separate tiles out of this one set.

These are as nice as any such product I've yet seen. The painting detail, especially, is good. I looked in vain for an artist's credit, but, whoever he is, I hope Heritage uses him again. And the folding chairs and benches are excellent!

I question the need to package the tiles in an expensive, full-color cardboard box along with a set of "instructions." The box won't last long, and really . . . who needs more instructions than "cut them out and play with them?" Not you or I, I hope. The box is certainly pretty, but this marketing decision probably added an unnecessary \$1.50 or \$2 to the cost.

On the whole though — if you like such things, the **DUNGEON FLOORS** ought to please you greatly.

— Steve Jackson

GAMEMASTER'S SHIELD AND REFERENCE TABLES (Timeline); \$5.00. Play aid for *The Morrow Project*. One 11" x 24" shield, three 8½" x 11" pages of tables, backprinted, bagged. Published 1981.

Timeline has redesigned their original Gamemaster's shield for *The Morrow Project*, adding three-hole punched reference pages and a bit of artwork to make the shield more useful to *Morrow* GMs. Much of the material of the original shield is now found on separate reference tables rather than on the shield itself; this includes the extended weapons list adding such non-*Morrow* weaponry as muskets, M1 Garands, BARs, and Schmeisser and Thompson SMGs. The reference sheets also include tables of radiation effects, bio-warfare agents, movement rates, medical and damage tables, combat tables, explosives and grenade effects, E-factors for various cartridges, and armor classes. The shield itself contains, on the GM side, tables for various types of damage, to-hit tables and modifiers, armor class table, an action/movement table and the table of PC/NPC relations. On the players side, flanking a striking painting of several *Morrow* vehicles emerging from a mushroom cloud, are silhouettes of the different vehicles and many of the Project's small arms to aid player identification.

The new MP shield and tables are much superior both in appearance and utility to the original. Use of the separate tables, which can be kept in a GM notebook with other *Morrow* materials, alleviates the need to cram everything onto the shield itself, yet allows the extra in-

formation to be readily available.

The only problem evident with the GM shield is the careless spelling and grammatical errors throughout ("their" for "there," and so on) — even the word "shield" is misspelled (twice!) on the cover sheet. The small printing on the reference pages has caused ink to collect in some letters, obscuring them slightly.

Even with such errors, **GAMEMASTER'S SHIELD AND REFERENCE PAGES** succeed admirably in their function — to facilitate play in an excellent role-playing game.

— William A. Barton

STAR PATROL MISSION MASTER PACK (Terra Games Company); \$5.00. Approved for *Star Patrol*. Forty 8½" x 11" sheets, errata, cut-out characters, bagged. Published 1981.

Rather than providing a GM (or MM) shield as might be expected, the **MISSION MASTER PACK** instead includes three 8½" x 11" cardstock reference sheets printed front and back primarily with the various combat tables from the game — modifiers, hit tables, miss locations, ranged, contact and explosive weapons table, armor and shielding tables and radiation levels. Also included on the charts are the success probability table, observation table and modifiers, alien attitude table and NPC loyalty table. The **PACK** contains six character sheets and six star chart sheets, plus six small-hex sheets and six square-grid sheets for mapping. The one-page scenario included is obviously derived from A. E. Van Vogt's *Voyage of the Space Beagle*, the same as used for the movie *Alien*. The packs being sold by Gamescience also include one of the cardstock cut-out character sheets from the first run of *Star Patrol*, the poorly printed one with the dull, runny colors, later replaced by better printed versions in the game itself. (Note: According to Lou Zocchi, anyone whose copy of the *Star Patrol* game contained the poorly printed sheet may get one of the better versions free by writing Gamescience.)

The combat tables are probably the most useful part of the **MISSION MASTER PACK**. Their use will eliminate a lot of page turning to find the tables in the rule book. A few of the tables could easily be used with other SF games (*Traveller* for one) that lack hit location tables, etc. The errata sheet is helpful, too.

The main problem with the **PACK** is its overall utility compared to the price. The character and star chart sheets could easily be photocopied from the game book. Hex and square grid sheets are easily obtainable. The scenario isn't all that useful. So the \$5 is mainly for the reference sheets and the errata.

If you're a *Star Patrol* Mission Master, however, and the price doesn't deter you, you might still find the **MISSION MASTER PACK** a useful purchase.

— William A. Barton

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