son) or chased off (coyote, bear, snake, etc.); or Indians. A roll against one or more of the wagon master's attributes determines how well each of these challenges is met: a roll against hunting determines if the party is successful in hunting the deer they've spotted, for example, and a roll against Indian lore determines if an attempted parley succeeds.

The encounter tables indicate that a lot of thought and research have gone into the development of OREGON TRAIL. For example, the western U. S. has been divided into ten zones, each of which has up to six different tribes of Indians which might be encountered. There are different odds for encountering each tribe, and different odds for which of five ways that tribe will react to you. The graphics are nice and the rules are well organized (although there are a few glitches in each).

Unfortunately, the actual game is boring. In a recent game, I made 52 decisions and 89 dice rolls. 26 of those decisions were whether to advance to the next hex. Many of the others were just as automatic. The game requires little mental effort — there is plenty of action, but it mainly depends on uncontrollable dice rolls. In addition, there is no player interaction, direct or indirect. You can travel side by side with another train for 2000 miles, and never exchange a word with it, much less supplies. Wagon masters do not increase in ability as they successfully overcome difficulties — you roll up a new master for each game. OREGON TRAIL can't really be cited for historical accuracy because you don't know what parts are accurate and what have been dramatized. In sum, a nice try, but I can't think of a good reason to buy the game.

— David Ladyman

SPACE EMPIRES (Mayfair); $5.00. Designed by Neil Zimmerer. One 5½" x 8½" 8-page rulebook, 17" x 22" map, 108 die-cut counters, bagged. 2-6 players; playing time about one hour. Published 1981.

SPACE EMPIRES is another in Mayfair Games' line of easy-to-play simulations, perhaps the most interesting of the group. It is a game of space combat between 12 different races for control of a star sector, with rules for combat, movement, production of ships, and, in the advanced version, special abilities. The rules, as with other Mayfair products, are simply put and quite clear overall, even to a novice. The graphics are quite pleasing, especially the rules cover; those on the map are simple, yet functional — no blazing starfields to dull the vision during play. The game can be played in under an hour in most cases, yet it offers the possibilities for longer play between balanced players. While not a great departure in concept from games such as *Stellar Conquest,* or other empire-building space combat games, it has the distinct advantage of being playable in a fraction of the time such bigger games take.

What really sets SPACE EMPIRES apart from the run-of-the-mill space combat game is the inclusion of special powers for the different races in the advanced game, *a la Cosmic Encounter.* These can run from the ability to capture and use opponents' ships or duplicate your own to reversing the combat odds if against you, replaying any combat once or even owning a disintegrator ray which insures an automatic win on every attack (but not defense). The powers are balanced by the different combat factors of each races' ships and by the number available in the counter mix (no more than that can be built). Thus the race with the disinte-

grator has only four ships maximum available to it and has to worry about how to defend its home and captured systems to offset its offensive capabilities.

The only real problems I see in SPACE EMPIRES is that the differing number of ships in the counter mix makes the game quite unbalanced, since the powers are not used to offset this — especially where ships of one race with the same combat factor of another race's ships are more numerous. The designer does, however, recommend that the basic game be played only to familiarize yourself with the system and that the advanced game be used from then on. There are a couple of minor errors, too — a plural verb used where a singular should be, etc. — but nothing really serious.

Overall, SPACE EMPIRES is an interesting, enjoyable game if you like easy-to-play "quickies" with a twist. If you prefer a lot of complications, you might want to pass this one up — or perhaps wait for the expansion set mentioned at the end.

— *William A. Barton*

STAR PATROL, Second Edition (Gamescience); $15.00. Designed by Michael Scott Kurtick and Rockland Russo. One 67-page rule book with 12-page pull-out, 22" x 34" hex sheet, three 6-sided, five polyhedral dice, boxed. 2 or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

Gamescience's SPACE PATROL was one of the earliest SFRPGs, interesting for its time, but not in the same class as later games such as *Traveller* or its kin. Now, however, it has been revised and expanded into STAR PATROL and is, in effect, a whole new system. Whereas

Space Patrol was little more than a set of rules for character generation and combat, with the added bonus of a scenario generator. STAR PATROL is a complete game system, incorporating, improving and expanding upon the old and adding a space travel and combat system, star system and planet generation tables and several sample scenarios. In addition, a set of plans for one of the more common STAR PATROL ships has been included, along with cut-out figures (*a la Cardboard Heroes*) and several dollars worth of dice.

STAR PATROL has many nice features: the weaponry section has been expanded to include many more weapons, primitive, modern and futuristic; exact parameters are provided to enable players to create characters of the most popular alien races in SF, from Green Martians to Gorn, from Kzinti to Wookies; and the scenario generators of the first edition have been reworked to provide a wider range of information than before. One interesting addition is the possibility for players to play Bolo characters—intelligent cybernetic tanks as created by Keith Laumer. Another admirable trait of STAR PATROL is its authors' openness in admitting the source of their ideas, reflected in an extensive SF bibliography at the end which even includes *Traveller* and *Ogre* as source materials. And, of course, the whole rule book is typeset, including the copious charts and tables, giving it a much neater appearance than the first edition.

There are some flaws. The rules are still just a bit vague in places, making it necessary for the "mission master" to establish his own guidelines here and there. A few of the charts and tables may take a bit of thought to figure out. How accurate some of the scientific assumptions are—especially in the star system generation tables—is open to question, too, but this is, after all, space opera, not hard SF. Several typos have wormed their way into the text and charts, but the errata printed on the inside back cover takes care of the worst of these. And I'm afraid the badly-printed cut-out characters here will never seriously threaten *Cardboard Heroes*.

Overall, STAR PATROL is a valid alternative to *Traveller*.

Relatively complete — and playable.

—*William A. Barton*

STARFIRE III: EMPIRES (Task Force Games); $3.95. Designed by David M. Weber. One 6" by 9" 28-page rules booklet and 13" by 11" campaign map. Two or more players; playing time several evenings and longer. Published 1981.

Task Force Games' *Starfire* was a fairly simple tactical game of starship battles between several races. *Starfire II* added fighters *a la Battlestar Galactica* and a bit more complexity to the system. Now STARFIRE III: EMPIRES takes the *Starfire* system even further, expanding and incorporating the tactical game into a grand strategic game of exploration and conquest, following in the footsteps of *Stellar Conquest, Starfall* and other games. The rules cover home worlds for several player races (including those ubiquitous Terrans of Sol), warp points and warp lines to other stars, star systems, colonization, alliances, genocide, rebellions, and more. Several new ship systems are introduced to help update and improve *Starfire* ships, too. The map shows the area of space surrounding the player race worlds and all unexplored systems—some 60—in the neighborhood. Ownership and knowledge of *Starfire* is absolutely necessary for playing

EMPIRES; so is *Starfire II* for full enjoyment, though you can get by without it.

STARFIRE III: EMPIRES seems tailor-made for those players who enjoyed the ease and simplicity — and didn't mind the scientific inaccuracies — of *Starfire*, yet who also long for campaign-type games, where they can boldly go . . . etc. Using a referee and the random generation of nonplayer systems and races (which includes rolls against militancy to determine what, if any, hostile actions they will take against players), EMPIRES can provide a lot of surprises.

One obvious liability in EMPIRES is the length of play involved. A campaign will take a minimum of several nights of play and could conceivably stretch out for months. Those who wish for short games should stick to *Starfire* itself and forget about empire building. The rules are a bit unclear in spots, such as on the number of closed warp points, but shouldn't be too difficult to figure out or reach a compromise with a referee-governed game.

Overall, STARFIRE III: EMPIRES does a good job of what it sets out to do—complicating and extending the *Starfire* system into a campaign game. If such appeals to you, and you already own *Starfire* and perhaps *Starfire II*, you should find it worth the buy.

—*William A. Barton*

SUPPLEMENTS

ACTION ABOARD (FASA); $6.00. Designed by Bill Paley. Approved for *Traveller*. One 6" by 9" 44-page booklet, one 11" by 17" sheet of deck plans, backprinted. Two or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1981.

ACTION ABOARD is not a scenario per se. It is a set of character descriptions and stats, along with some situational ideas and scenario outlines, which referees may use to create scenarios for player characters aboard the 5000-ton luxury liner, *King Richard*. Complete stats and descriptions are given of ten important crew members, from Captain Ilana Iiree to Security Rover Four Rachel Three-Two-Seven (a clone). Descriptions and stats for seven major and 12 minor passenger characters who may become involved in a murder scenario are also provided. Situations, characters and encounter tables for a boarding action and seven pages of outline adventures add to the possibilities. Deck plans and a description of the ship round out the book.

The best aspect of ACTION ABOARD has to be the characters. Each is complete with stats, skills and a full description of past history, occupation, likes, dislikes and quirks—plus an appropriate illustration by Kevin Siembieda. From ex-commando General Sir Arthur Flintlock to the mysterious pirate known as Nightshade, the characters are ready for the referee to utilize to the fullest. Just the right touch of humor is maintained, too, such as in the description of how one character set off an aborigine rebellion on one planet by mistaking a religious shrine for an outhouse! The addition of the insert deck plans and the ship descriptions are a handy plus for those who don't have and don't wish to buy the 15mm plans. There are a few problems in ACTION ABOARD—a couple of typos, some abrupt changes in type face—and these are mostly minor. A set of DMs to avoid setting off a booby-trapped ship's locker should be -DMs rather than the +DMs listed, and I'd have added Demolitions skill as a DM there, too. But this is nothing most refs won't catch.
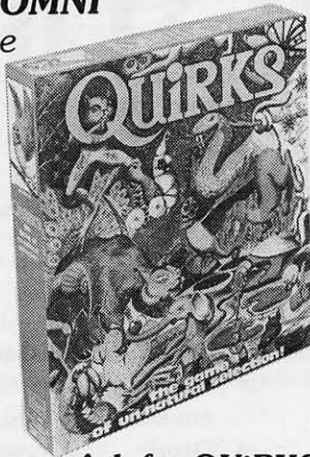
Overall, ACTION ABOARD is quite well

WRAITH OVERLORD (Judges Guild); $12. Designed by Scott Fulton. "Universal Fantasy Supplement." Booklet of 112 8½" x 11" pages including covers, two maps. Two or more players; playing time indefinite. Published 1981.
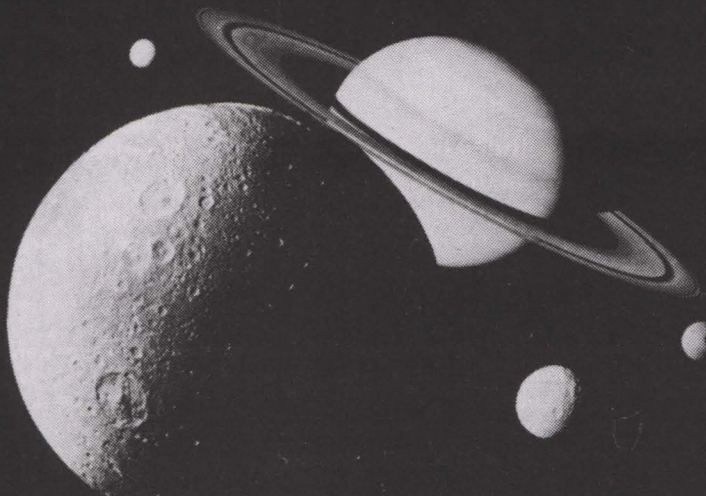
This package describes underground areas of Judges Guild's *City State of the Invincible Overlord*. There are two or three levels, including five temples, goblin tunnels, an extensive tomb, etc., all connected by secret undergound passages. The discrete parts could be used in non-*City State* scenarios by those who don't have that package. The author assumes reader familiarity with *City State*, but the work is more or less intelligible without that knowledge.

All monsters are described in the text and in a section at the back. Magic spells, the skills belonging to professions, and much else are not explained, but are obviously closely related to *Dungeons & Dragons*. In fact, this is largely a D&D/*Arduin* supplement, though Judges Guild has made greater efforts to universalize this package than heretofore.

About half of the 61 NPCs described are prisoners in or below the city jail. Every person mentioned is an adventurer, most of them above first level. (Even a peaceful baker is a fourth-level bard!) Fortunately, the author has limited himself to characters no higher than ninth level. There are some good touches in the dungeons, but most of them are arranged to provide combat opportunities, not puzzles or long-term brainwork.

There are several weaknesses which should have been corrected by rigorous editing, such as a map on the back cover where the players could see it, reliance on height-and-weight table which frequently gives ludicrous results, one over-wide column of type instead of two read-able columns, occasional grammatical slips, and