



Blastoff!

The work
is done —
now comes
the fun

by Steve Winter

The STAR FRONTIERS™ game project was ambitious from the start. The problems that appear when designing three complete and detailed alien cultures, a huge frontier area, futuristic equipment and weapons, and the game rules that make all these elements work together, were impossible to predict and not easy to overcome. But the difficulties were resolved, and the result is a game that lets players enter a truly wide-open space society and explore, wander, fight, trade, or adventure through it in the best science-fiction tradition.

The STAR FRONTIERS set includes:

- A 16-page Basic Game rule book
- A 64-page Expanded Game rule book
- A 32-page introductory module, *Crash on Voltarnus*
- 2 full-color maps, 23" x 35" and 10¾" by 17"
- A sheet of 285 full-color counters

The races

A quartet of intelligent, starfaring races inhabit the STAR FRONTIERS rules. New player characters can be

members of any one of these groups:

Humans (basically just like you and me)

Vrusk (insect-like creatures with 10 limbs)

Yazirians (ape-like humanoids able to glide short distances using lateral membranes)

Dralasites (amorphous creatures that can control and even alter the shape of their bodies)

Characters for the STAR FRONTIERS game are created by a system that generates two characteristics at a time. Similar abilities are paired, so no character will ever have (for instance) a high dexterity score and a low reaction speed. In addition, characters can use experience points they earn during adventures to raise their ability scores, to learn one of 13 special skills, or to improve a skill they already know.

The frontier

After communicating via radio messages for years, these four starfaring races meet in a region of space called the Frontier Sector. This vast region, 1,500 cubic light-years, contains 38 star systems. Only 17 of these systems have been explored and colonized when the game starts.

Free enterprise is the law of the Frontier, and corporations compete with each other and local governments to control the most profitable areas and to open routes to unexplored systems. Player characters are placed in this unexplored territory. They can work as corporate or government agents, or can strike out on their own as free-lance adventurers.

Despite their apparent differences, the four races share one thing: a common enemy that came upon them some time ago. Without warning, a fleet of warships attacked Frontier outposts and isolated colonies, destroying whatever they found wherever they went, fighting to the death or destroying themselves to avoid being captured. Only after several battles was it learned that the marauders were the Sathar, an evil race of worm-like aliens from outside the frontier.

In the face of this onslaught, the four player races formed a loose military alliance to protect their colonies: the United Planetary Federation. The second wave of Sathar attacks was met by UPF warships. The invaders were slowly beaten back, system by system, until they withdrew completely, leaving no clues that would lead the victors back to their home world.

Defeated in space, the Sathar turned to terrorism. Humans, Dralasites, Vrusk, and Yazirians were recruited to sabotage frontier bases and destroy the morale of the colonists. These deadly agents now lurk on almost every known planet, carrying out their master's orders and undermining the efforts of local authorities to build up their worlds.

The adventure

With the frontier as its background, the action in a STAR FRONTIERS game focuses on exploring new worlds, discovering alien secrets or unearthing ancient cultures. The rule book includes detailed guidelines for creating adventures, alien planets and the plants, animals, and intelligent creatures that live on them.

Something the game does not contain is rules for spaceship design or combat. Traveling on commercial starlines is covered in detail, but no rules are given for player-owned ships or spaceship weapons. This (admittedly) very important aspect of science fiction was left out because there simply was not enough room in the rule book for it. We didn't want to insert a weak set of starship rules, or raise the price of the first set by increasing the size of the rule book.

Instead, the starship rules will be published as a separate boxed game. This will include rules for star ship design and construction, combat, character skills related to starships, starship deck plans, rules for fleet combat and boarding ac-

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tions, and a complete starship boardgame that can be played with or without the original STAR FRONTIERS set.

The long journey

Design work on the game started in the summer of 1979. Dave Cook and Lawrence Schick, full-time designers for TSR Hobbies, were assigned to the project. Their goal was to create a wide-open science fiction role-playing game with a solid scientific base. TSR wanted a game that would satisfy fans of hard-core science fiction, and still be easy to play. Dave and Lawrence started by designing a character-generation system and simple rules for movement and combat. Then they started playtesting, adding and revising.

The game grew and changed for two years, until it was finally submitted for review in the summer of 1981. During those two years, TSR Hobbies grew tremendously. The company had discovered that its games appealed to a much broader audience than wargamers and fantasy fans alone. D&D® and AD&D™ games, for instance, were selling to peo-

ple who had never played a wargame or a role-playing game before. In order to tap this huge market, TSR decided to restructure the STAR FRONTIERS game so it would appeal to people who had never seen this type of game.

This decision meant most of the game needed to be rewritten and reorganized so persons with no gaming experience could buy it, take it home and play it without learning a lot of rules. The number and types of dice in the game were changed, the maps and counters were added, and many realistic but complex rules were sacrificed for playability. In general, there was an overall softening of the game's "hard core."

Another addition was a separate, introductory-level game written especially for newcomers to role-playing games. By de-emphasizing role playing, it allows new gamers to start playing the sample adventures almost immediately, using simple character creation, movement and combat rules.

In order to meet the game's scheduled release date, this revision work was split up among different members of TSR's product development staff. The project was completed in time for its scheduled release at the GEN CON® XV game convention.

The STAR FRONTIERS game in its final form retains the original concepts developed during the first two years of playtesting, but many of the mechanics of play and specific rules are considerably different from the original versions. Although many TSR employees were sad to say goodbye to the original hard-core version, others predict the revised STAR FRONTIERS game will be very well received.

Because of the space that would have been needed, a complete list of credits was not published with the game. For those who are interested in the game's long and fascinating history, the credits are listed below.

Concepts and original design: Dave Cook, Lawrence Schick

Revision: Mike Gray, Allen Hammack, Harold Johnson, David C. Sutherland III, Steve Winter

Crash on Voltarnus: Mark Acres, Tom Moldvay, Doug Niles

Art: Jeff Easley, Larry Elmore, Jim Holloway, Harry Quinn, Stephen D. Sullivan

Editing: Steve Winter, Troy Denning

Playtesters: Mark Acres, Dave Bullis, Brad Cihla, Dave Cook, Helen Cook, Jeff Dee, Don Dexter, Mike Gray, E. Gary Gygax, Luke Gygax, Allen Hammack, Kevin Hendryx, Jeff Herndon, Chris Holmes, John Eric Holmes, Josie Irvine, Harold Johnson, Dave S. LaForce, Frank Mentzer, Tom Moldvay, Will Niebling, Doug Niles, Erol Otus, Jon Pickens, Michael Price, Paul Reiche III, Bill Renter, Evan Robinson, Lawrence Schick, Donald Snow, Stephen D. Sullivan, Phil Taterczynski, Jim Ward, Bill Willingham.