



# StarQuestions

*Questions, answers, and advice on STAR FRONTIERS®  
gaming*

**by Penny Petticord and Ed Greenwood**

This time this column takes another look at the STAR FRONTIERS science-fiction game. In addition, a number of readers wrote to ask questions about the Zethra, an alien NPC race detailed in DRAGON® Magazine issue #84 (p. 76-80); these questions are answered at the end of this article. If you need some answers to help your science-fiction gaming campaign, write down your questions and mail them to StarQuestions, Dragon Publishing, P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

**Q:** In the STAR FRONTIERS Campaign Book, the prices listed for shipping cargo (p. 451) are unclear. Are they the costs to buy the cargo outright and to sell it, or are they the prices to ship it?

**A:** The chart assumes that the hauler (probably an independent one) will buy the cargo outright, haul it to another planet, and resell it. Haulers who work under a company charter do not have to use this chart, as they are paid for their services only. The "Price per Unit at Source" column tells you how much it will cost to purchase a load of a given cargo.

The character then loads the cargo on his ship, carries it to another planet where there is a good market for the item, and resells it at the price given in the "Price per Unit at Destination" column. (Cargo cannot be resold at the source.) The hauler must then pay his operating expenses (crew salaries, supplies, fuel, maintenance, etc.) out of the money taken in from the sale.

Prices given assume that the cargo has been hauled a moderate distance at a moderate risk. If the run is shorter and less dangerous than an average one, the referee should adjust the resale value accordingly to keep the campaign economics in balance. After all, if an independent hauler is making too large a profit margin on a given run, another hauler or company will certainly undercut the character's prices and take his business away.

**Q:** The players in my campaign want to start a planetary or interstellar business. How would they go about doing this?

**A:** Passenger transport, freight transport, and mining businesses are detailed in the Campaign Book, as is obtaining a charter from a large

corporation. Players who wish to start some other type of business should design a detailed plan for its initial set-up and operation, then present it to the referee for approval. The referee is responsible for making sure the enterprise does not disrupt campaign balance, and may impose whatever legal restrictions, taxes, tariffs, and other external controls he deems necessary. The player may have to revise the plan if problems appear with the set-up he envisions.

**Q:** Will a timeline history for the STAR FRONTIERS game ever be made, as was done for the GAMMA WORLD® game in DRAGON® Magazine, issue #88?

**A:** An article on that topic has, in fact, been done and should appear in these pages within the next few issues.

**Q:** What are the statistics for the Zebulon and K'tsa-Kar systems and their inhabited planets? The Expanded Game Rules did not describe them.

**A:** The statistics for these systems were accidentally dropped from the rules. An article will appear soon in the ARES™ Section in which these

systems, as well as other inhabited systems of the Frontier, are described.

Q: What were the original homeworlds of the Dralasites, Vrusk, Yazirians, and Humans of the STAR FRONTIERS game?

A: Placement and description of the homeworlds of the four races were slated for inclusion in a future product. As of this time, only rough development has been done, and the information is not ready for release.

Q: What are the game statistics for a flamethrower?

A: A hand flamer appeared in the original rules, but was dropped in editing. It was similar in size and weight to a small needler, and it operated on a replaceable fuel cartridge. Statistics are as follows: Damage - 6d10; Ammo - 1 shot cartridge; Rate - 1; Defense - inertia; Range - no medium, long, or extreme, with statistics as per a sonic disruptor for point blank and short.

Q: In "The Battle at Ebony Eyes" in issue #88, the SAV *Apocalypse* and *Disease* are in the same hex (4116). Is this correct?

A: Yes. The duplicates that would appear of each ship might initially confuse the UPF player into believing that only one ship (or more than two) are in that hex.

Q: Can player characters be pirates, robots, or cybots?

A: Player characters can become pirates, although no special provisions are made for starting out as one. Pirate characters run extreme risks and may become the target of all law enforcement agencies in the Frontier (particularly Star Law).

Robots and cybots cannot be player characters; they have personalities but have no free will. Freedom of choice puts excitement into the game. No one would want to run a character that could only do what someone else told him to do.

Q: What would be the cost, mass, and combat statistics for crossbows, nunchucks, and Chinese throwing stars?

A: For mass and combat statistics, treat a crossbow as a musket, nunchucks as a nightstick, and a throwing star as a knife. These are very rare and archaic weapons, so their cost will vary with availability; prices will be similar to the comparison weapons listed above, but could rise to extreme levels.

Q: Are there mutants in the STAR FRONTIERS universe?

A: Perhaps, although none have been reported or detailed for game use as of yet. The referee is free to create mutants for use as NPCs, but he is on his own for specific designs and game balancing. The game system is not designed to handle mutant PCs who have exceptional powers, so use caution in this area.

Q: In the Knight Hawks rules, the decks of a starship are arranged perpendicular to the ship's main axis so that the ship's nose is "up." This provides for a sense of gravity for the crew when the vessel is accelerating through sect internal gravity when the ship is on a planet's surface? (Note: see illustration of the *Osprey*'s orientation on the "Warriors of White Light" module, which indicates that the interior of the ship is lying on its side.)

A: The illustration in question is not quite accurate. Ships capable of landing on planets (such as shuttles, system ships of hull size 5 or less, assault scouts, and other scout-class starships) always land nose up so that the interior of the ship is oriented normally. Larger ships cannot land on planets, so they would have no orientation problems. The orientation of a ship does not matter when it is docked at a space station, since docked ships would be subject to the same artificial gravity as the docking bay of the space station.

Q: Can stargates exist in the STAR FRONTIERS game?

A: It isn't clear what you mean by "stargates." Certainly, a referee may add extra features like "stargates" (however you conceive of them) to his campaign if desired. If by "stargate" you mean a teleportation device capable of transporting spacecraft instantly from one star system to another, you should be aware that this may undo a large portion of game's inherent balance, and may cause serious problems unless you alter other parts of the game rules at the same time.

The game mechanic for quick intersystem travel is "jumping through the void," which accomplishes the same thing as a "stargate" would.

Q: How many different native races exist in the Frontier?

A: Seventeen. However, you may make up as many as you want. Some unofficial races may be presented in the ARES™ Section from time to time, such as the Zethra (see below). You may expand theme as you see fit.

Q: Can ships be made with hull sizes larger than 20?

A: Yes, but they would have to be custom-designed and built from scratch by experts, an expensive process since the hulls would be non-standard. Maintenance would also be far more expensive than usual, since such hulls might not use any standard parts. You can extrapolate statistics from the information in the Campaign Book to get base figures for building costs and the like. Note that the SAV Juggernaut (from last month's ARES™ Section) was built around a hull vastly larger than size 20. Building it was a tremendous financial drain on the Sathar, and they never tried it again.

### The Zethra

Q: If they lack the ability to see or appreciate colors, how are Zethra able to match all color hues exactly by altering the pigmentation of their skin cells?

A: Zethra distinguish different colors only as differences in wavelengths of light reflected by all surfaces, in the same way that they sense other radiations (such as heat, light, and electrical energy). They are thus able to alter their coloration to match that of surroundings perfectly — without seeing colors as we do. This is somewhat akin to seeing all colors as varying shades of gray (as Dralasites do); with practice, one can readily tell one hue from another without being able to view or appreciate colors as others do.

The "seeing" of a Zethra is performed only through its tentacle-like "see-feelers" or "seefers," and thus it can only match hues within 5 meters of (or touching) its seefers. A Zethra who has learned the names of various colors could describe patterns, contrasting or complimentary colors, and so forth perfectly to others, but would fail to appreciate the aesthetics of colors, or "see" them as others can.

Q: Why is the damage done by Zethra discharges only modified by -2 per meter between a Zethra and target when conducted through metal,

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whereas water (which "transmits Zethra jolts poorly") only causes a modifier of -3 per 10 meters separating Zethra and target?

**A:** A Zethra's discharges are believed to serve only secondarily as weapons (one Zethra, after all, cannot harm another Zethra by such means), and are not offensive "bolts" or lightning strikes. They are strongly affected by the nature of the conducting medium through which they pass. In the case of metals, which conduct electrical currents by means of electron lows, a Zethra discharge is lessened in both directional accuracy and force more than in water. It is thought by a number of scientists that Zethra discharges contain many sub-atomic particles that react readily with free electrons and that this makes metal of any type a poorer conductor of Zethra discharges than of artificially-generated electrical currents.

It must be emphasized that these creatures are still poorly understood and that studies continue only slowly due to the difficult nature of Zethra. Recent filings by the scientist Arlume of Cassidine (not yet verified by Pan-Galactic Information Central's own agents), indicate that a Zethra's discharges do have a limited range even in still waters — the cumulative modifier of -3 per 10 meters rising to -1 per additional meter after a distance of fifty-two meters is exceeded.

**Q:** A creature that directly converts matter to energy seems impossible. If one existed, it would probably be most efficient in such conversions, and thus eat very seldom — perhaps, to most observers, seemingly never. A "direct converter" would prefer non-organic matter to organic; while there may be (slightly) more energy in organic substances, such substances are also more resistant to conversion and produce many more by-products, a number of which would likely be poisonous. How exactly do Zethra consume matter?

**A:** Zethra matter-to-energy conversion is done by some natural process which remains a mystery to Frontier scientists of all races, even after exhaustive physical and field examinations. Classified computer files exist on this creature, and the information therein is considered sensitive for good reasons. Scientific study continues, and some further, as-yet-unverified results have been

filed by various scientists in the "Active & Ongoing" computer banks of Pan-Galactic Information Central (PGIC).

Overseen of such files by PGIC personnel reveals several key entries:

1) Duthin of Prenglar has not yet positively identified any instance of a Zethra converting inorganic matter to energy, and has found few suggestions of such occurrences in existing Pan-Galactic files, but reminds inquisitors that the tendency of Zethra to convert organic matter has been established by observation.

2) The frequency of Zethra matter-energy conversion was deemed "seldom" (as compared to human frequencies of eating) in separate reports by scientists Marakson of Dramune, Orlag of Duane's Star, and Niuu of Cassidine. Detailed observations of such conversion are contained in all three reports; none seem likely to alter the present file's measurements of 220-440 SEU storage in Zethra bodies, and approximate common daily requirements of 20 SEU.

Orlag's report, however, raises the question of conversion by-products.

Some, he asserts, are used as "raw material" for Zethra body repair or growth and expansion; others may be eliminated, in subatomic form, in Zethra electrical discharges. Other methods of by-product elimination are possible — expulsion in fluid form through the skin, for example, is thought to occur automatically when Zethra are immersed in moving water. Possible by-products poisonous to Zethra are rumored to exist, PGIC personnel admit, because the last two tapes of Orlag's researches dealing with by-products were designated "classified" in the initial scan, and Pan-Galactic Security refuses to discuss the issue. Inquiries have led professionally curious individuals to ask (or even attempt to test) the Zethra on this issue, but no verifiable information has yet been uncovered.

Niuu of Cassidine warns that these creatures should not be judged or analyzed purely by Frontier standards and science. All unclassified material entries on the Zethra, both verified and tabled awaiting verification, bear the closing note "VRC" (meaning, "various researches continue").

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