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OPEN BOX

PARANOIA

West End Games

£19.95

Most RPG's advise the referee to be an impartial arbiter, weighing the odds to ensure that player characters have a reasonable chance of survival and assume that the players will probably succeed most of the time. *Paranoia* is a little different.

Paranoia takes the basic backstabbing concepts of *Killer* and *Illuminati*, and converts them into a role-playing game set against a post-holocaust society ruled by an omnipotent (and hopelessly insane) computer. The background is loathsomely unpredictable, and 'allies' can be far deadlier than enemies.

Players can be found guilty of treason by thought, by deed, by omission, by acquisition of illegal skills, by accident of birth, or by the malice and actions of other players. Every character has a secret mutant ability, belongs to a secret society, and lives in dread of The Computer.

Game mechanics are simple, but ask more of the referee than many RPG's. All player characters are troubleshooters for The Computer, and must destroy its enemies. However, almost any sort of action can be construed as treason to The Computer. Good actions (killing traitors, recovering the property of The Computer, and exposing spies) earn Commendation points. Bad actions (asking too many questions, arguing with superiors, losing equipment, and virtually anything The Computer dislikes) earn Treason points. Characters with at least ten more Treason points than Commendation points are liquidated and replaced by clones. The referee must keep track of these points throughout the campaign, but must never reveal them to the players. This makes it difficult to run open games, or campaigns with more than one referee. NPC's, especially superior officers, tend to liquidate characters for arbitrary or imagined offenses, as well as for treason. The only rewards for success are Commendation points, which earn improved security levels and give access to better equipment and skills.

Actions are resolved by percentile dice rolls against skills, though throws against characteristics may be used instead. Combats are resolved by the referee, who is supposed to make fights as confusing and lethal as possible. The combat system ignores most normal wargaming concepts, concentrating on flamboyance and the speed with which

the players respond to the situation the referee describes. There are mechanisms for skill improvement, advancement in secret societies, and sundry other aspects of life in the wonderful world of The Computer. However, this information is all supposed to be a closely guarded secret of the referee. Even the exact cause of the holocaust is a secret, though the Computer claims that Communists were to blame. However, The Computer is insane...

The game box contains three books (one for players, two for the referee, a total of 140 pages including a sample adventure) plus two percentile dice and an errata sheet. All are well presented, and tables needed by the referee and players are duplicated where necessary. Box and internal art are very funny, though some illustrations are repeated several times with different captions.

I like *Paranoia*, but I'm not sure that I'd want to run it as a prolonged campaign. It's the sort of concept which works well as light relief from a 'serious' RPG campaign, and will definitely appeal to 'hack and slay' merchants. Dedicated rule lawyers and wargamers will hate it. Overall, a lot of fun for a minimum of three or four players.

Presentation:	8	Rules:	7
Playability:	8	Complexity:	5
Enjoyment:	9	Overall:	7

Marcus L Rowland

ASLAN, ALIEN MODULE 1	£7.95
K'KREE, ALIEN MODULE 2	£7.95
VARGR, ALIEN MODULE 3	£7.95

Game Designers' Workshop

These modules are part of a new colour-subjects of these items have been raised before - mainly in the *TAS Journal* - but never in so much detail. Veteran *Traveller* consumers need not fear that all they are getting is old material in new packaging. Each module may be used with any of the versions of the *Traveller* rules.

I have a particular interest in *Aslan*, since they inhabit much of my own campaign area. For the most part I was not disappointed with *Aslan* ('Adventure and Intrigue with a Proud Warrior Race'). Naturally I could have done with even more social and historical background than is provided, but what you get inside the folder-type cover is a 40-page booklet jam-packed with detail. It covers *Aslan* character generation (not just standard *Traveller* but also *Mercenary* and *High Guard* expanded procedures), physical details, history, society and so on, and full procedures for generating *Aslan* names and worlds. There are extremely useful sections on playing and refereeing *Aslan*, plus some ships and equipment (mostly weapons) types. There are lots of tables and the cover includes a map of *Aslan* space plus excellent anatomical drawings. Lastly (and least in my opinion) there is an adventure which seems meandering and overly ambitious given that the aim is to introduce players to the *Aslan*.

K'Kree ('Encounters with the Enigmatic Centaurs') is in the same format to the same level of detail, though adapted to different requirements. *K'Kree* are more 'alien' than *Aslan*; that is, the *Aslan* are closer in behaviour and outlook to

(though by no means the same as) humans. A *K'Kree* player would ideally be a vegetarian living in an outdoor commune, since meat-eaters and confined spaces are bad news to a *K'Kree* and the player has to cope with role-playing a whole family and retinue who act in concert along fairly predictable and role-specialised lines. Playing *K'Kree* well would demand a lot from the player, and I would recommend some experience (perhaps with *Vargr* or *Aslan*) is needed before attempting to play one. Three adventures are provided and together they form a much better introduction (than with *Aslan*). However, they take place in different parts of the *GDW* universe so continuity is a problem unless they are treated purely as a learning experience.

I've saved the best until last since, in my opinion, *Vargr* (the most recent release) is the best all round play aid since the *Traveller Adventure*. Following the pattern set in *Aslan* and *K'Kree*, the physiology, sociology, politics, languages and career generation procedures constitute most of the volume. Inside the front cover are the now usual anatomical studies, which brings me to a slight criticism that the studies, text, and cover illustrations seem to disagree on details.

Although the format is similar to the first two modules the likeness ends here. The introductory adventure material is much superior to the earlier products not only in content, which includes an excursion into language translation and interpretation and data on the *Gvurrdon* sector immediately to coreward of the Spinward Marches, but also in its suitability as an introduction to the *Vargr*. In all, highly recommended especially to a player group nearing the end of the plot in the *Traveller Adventure* or other Spinward Marches campaigns.

	Aslan	K'Kree	Vargr
Presentation:	7	7	8
Enjoyment:	9	7	9
Complexity:	8	8	8
Rules:	7	7	8
Overall:	9	7	9

Bob McWilliams

THE ROMULANS	£10.95
THE ORION RUSE	£6.95
MARGIN OF PROFIT	£6.95

FASA

Both *Margin of Profit* and *The Orion Ruse* are designed to be used in conjunction with the supplement *Trader Captains and Merchant Princess*. In *Margin of Profit* the merchant aspect of the game remains in the background. The characters enter into a deal at the beginning and the plot unfolds from that point. It could well be used as an introduction to a merchant campaign, since although it is based around a merchant deal, no real merchant orientated decisions have to be taken by the players. Full details of a 9 man crew are provided and these can either be used for the scenario or replaced with a player's own character; if nothing else they are a guide to what FASA think a merchant crew should look like.

The Orion Ruse is different in that negotiating a trade agreement forms a fundamental part of the plot. Another



basic part is that the players are split into 2 teams, one of Star Fleet personnel and the other of merchants. Both teams essentially have different objectives, but they need the help of the other team to achieve it. Thus as the scenario unfolds not only are the players interacting with NPC's but they are also cajoling, threatening and dealing with each other. I found the idea very interesting and will definitely use it as the basis for a campaign, with Star Fleet and merchant characters working together.

The booklets themselves are presented in the same sequence as previous Star Trek scenarios, with the 2nd edition giving the main details of what takes place. Perhaps the easiest way of describing this is if you imagine the scenario as a television episode with titled chapters describing each scene. As play proceeds you simply skip to the appropriate scene.

At the beginning of the booklet is an overview of the plot, and at the back are the NPC stats, background information on worlds etc, followed by the maps and the designers notes to the GM.

All in all it is pretty comprehensive, but nevertheless you will need to ad lib at various times. The scenarios are puzzles which are investigated, rather than a series of fights and traps in keyed rooms. So if the players go wrong in their investigations and, say, decide to raid the home of the foreman who last serviced the engines of some ship or other, it is extremely unlikely the scenario will have any details to cover this. After all, it covers the details of the

correct trail, and can't cover every possible false trail the players might follow. Hint, if you look carefully at the background and the designer's notes before you start, this will usually get you out of trouble. Don't hesitate too long while you think up something, otherwise the players will guess they are on the wrong track because there are no details in the book about it.

The FASA supplement *The Romulans* is the follow-up to the *Klingon* supplement. Personally FASA have my sympathy; it must be really tricky to write a supplement when in the next movie the director might contradict the whole thing. Take the Klingons for instance, there are now three different types and they have been given the most advanced Romulan ship available complete with cloaking device. The Romulans, don't forget, were so fanatical about military secrets that no Romulan had ever been seen, never mind captured, until Captain Kirk achieved it. Then FASA has to write a supplement which allows for this totally illogical occurrence, and they have done a pretty good job as well.

It includes all the details needed to generate Romulan player characters or personality NPC's, following the same format as in the basic Star Trek rules. There is background history and a map of the Star Empire, details of Romulan life, government and religion, and a starship recognition file. The map includes the location of a few worlds, and a world log for these are printed. However with the exception of one planet, all of the others do not have any local races on

them. The starship recognition file consists of drawings of ships, including shuttles, and a description of them. This description, for example, would be about a ship's origin and use, but not speed or armament. There is also a players' manual giving details of the Romulan Empire that Star Fleet Intelligence has been deemed to have found out. This details the Romulan personality and equipment, and surprisingly, most but not all the details about the Romulan ships that would be needed to run them. This fragmentation of the rules, with some details withheld from players and some from the GM, follows the same format as the basic rule books. For instance in the original books, combat ranges and damage are in book 1, the descriptions are in book 2, and the modifiers are in book 3. Incidentally if you haven't found them yet, the wide angle stun combat modifiers aren't in the combat section, they are under Equipment Use, sub-section Sidearms. The flicking between rule books isn't difficult to master, just irritating.

All in all if you want to run Romulan characters or a Romulan campaign, then this is for you. My only reservation is that for the money I would expect a little more in the way of details on subjects such as ships, worlds, etc.

	Romulans	Orion Ruse	Margin of Profit
Presentation:	9	9	9
Value:	6	8	8
Clarity:	7	8	8
Overall:	8	9	8

R Jarnor