BLASTER AND LASER DESIGN by David L. Pulver

Issue 3/37 November '11

MORE ULTRA-TECH GUNS AND HEAVY WEAPONS by Mark Gellis

THE KILLER CLEANBOT by Michele Armellini THINKING MACHINES by Thomas Weigel

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#### **Article Colors**

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.) Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features Purple: Systemless Features

*Green:* Distinguished Columnists

**COVER ART** Jeffrey K. Starling **INTERIOR ART** *Greg Hyland* 

### IN THIS ISSUE

Innovation never rests on its laurels, and neither does *Pyramid!* This month, we have more future tech and tools that may change the world . . . or do something *really* impressive!

Is it the ultimate tool for making colonist-worthy planets? Or the most destructive tech ever devised? (Hint: it's probably both.) *Starmaker, Starbreaker* provides a systemless overview of this mechanical marvel: its history, uses, and implications.

From the mind of David L. Pulver, co-author of *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, comes *Blaster and Laser Design*. The latest installment of *Eidetic Memory* walks interested parties through how to design a slew of TL9+ energy weapons, including a new example gun.

Add extra realism and detail to computers in your game with *Thinking Machines*. These variant rules for building computers in *GURPS* will overclock your campaign's processor with a *wide* range of computer categories and options, from molecular processors to multi-Dyson-sphere monstrosities.

Do you prefer solid projectiles over energy beams? Then you need *More Ultra-Tech Guns and Heavy Weapons*. Here you'll find descriptions and *GURPS Ultra-Tech* stats for over two dozen new future-tech firearms of assorted sizes.

Are you holding a broken warp drive while staring down an army of laser-robots, and all you have is duct tape, a broken toaster, and a lot of sweat? Matt Riggsby – author of *GURPS Fantasy-Tech: The Edge of Reality* – has been in that *exact* situation. The fruits of his experience are *Mr. Fixit*, which expands the *GURPS Basic Set* equipment repair rules.

After a hard day of shooting stuff up with the best weapons the future has to offer, you want to relax with the best amenities the future has to offer. Outfit your post-modern pad with the latest options in *Future Home Tech*.

Unfortunately, not all home tech is benign. Michele Armellini (author of *GURPS WWII: Their Finest Hour*) warns you to check your cute little vacuum cleaner carefully – it could be *The Killer Cleanbot!* This handy little murderer comes complete with *GURPS* stats. You'll never worry about cleaning again!

This month's *Random Thought Table* explores how the early stages of technology influence procedures later on and can even spill over into the mainstream. *Odds and Ends* takes a look at adtech and includes a *Murphy's Rules* that'll drive you crazy.

Whether forging worlds, firing weapons, or fixing widgets, this month's *Pyramid* is a trove of tech and toys. It's the future; what're you waiting for?

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#### **Pyramid Magazine**

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# FROM THE EDITOR

#### **INVENTIONS ARE THE MOTHER OF NECESSITIES**

Hey, all! *Pyramid* Editor Steven Marsh here. Whenever I'm acting as a GM, I take my cue from God: Once you define what exists, the rest of creation falls into place nicely.

This issue includes a number of "meta" possibilities for looking at ultra-tech in a different way. Whether coming up with new computers or the cutting-edge of laser technology, wrapping your mind around what technology you want to include in a setting goes a long way toward fleshing out the parts of the campaign you hadn't gotten around to yet.

As I was writing this month's *Odds and Ends* (p. 39), I came up with an idea for a futuristic campaign that I hadn't considered (in a nutshell: "all tech has advertising – *all of it*"). It came to mind by coming up with a rule, then thinking through the implications of it. I wrote an entire *column* (pp. 37-38) about

how bits of the campaign world can be filled in by mulling over the implications of the technology.

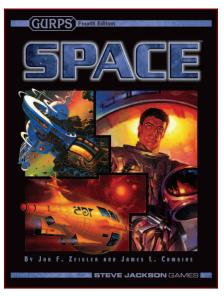
The same principle applies on the player's side. For example, having solid rules in place for how to rig a stopgap tech solution (pp. 28-30) makes it easier for players to envision a hero who gets in situations where he can kludge tech. As another example, in one game I played, the heroine wore top-of-the-line futuristic armor. In crunching the numbers



one time, I realized she could jump from a ludicrous height (like, terminal velocity) and land relatively unscathed most of the time. This led

the time. This led to her hero using this technique ... often. It became one of her character's trademarks, and eventually the technique was adapted by her cohorts in the military. It didn't end up unbalancing the campaign or breaking anything, and visions

> of heroic "death from above" just felt cool. And it wouldn't have been possible without



thinking of the implications of the tech in the game world.

Hopefully this issue sparks your own light bulbs. (Like, what if there were a technological innovation in light bulbs where they consume nearly no power when on, yet suffer a high breakage potential when turned on and off? That might lead to a setting where people use sheets or covers to block perpetually illuminated lights . . . that'd be pretty different! Hmm . . .)

#### WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So, did this issue give you a eureka-in-the-bathtub moment? You can send file your field reports privately to **pyramid@sjgames.com**, or share your research findings with the world (or worlds!) at **forums.sjgames.com**.

**November 2011** 

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### STARMAKER, STARMAKER, STARBREAKER THE MOST DANGEROUS MACHINE IN EXISTENCE BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Good afternoon, all sapient beings, and welcome to Cosmos Today. I'm your host, Brent Cleopatra Mercy, reporting live from the dome, here at Galactic Zero.

Today's topic is Imru Niji Al-Khem, the inventor of the Starmaker. It's been 50 years to the day since his tragic assassination at the hands of a rival corporation's mercenaries. Fifty years without the guiding presence of a man who created what some call the wonder of our age, and 75 years since its unveiling.

Today, we're going to talk to the board of directors at Khemworks, the company Imru Niji founded, to see how they're handling his legacy. We're also going to ask members of all five major governmental parties whether his creation is as safe as the company says, and why no one cares that its inner workings are as secretive as its late creator.

But first, we have live feed from the far-off Cameroon IV System, where the Starmaker is currently in operation. As you can see, it's already made contact with the star, and is turning it from a relatively small and dim star into something that can sustain life on numerous planets. Khemworks engineers tell us that the process should be done in about 45 minutes...

*Um*, wait. We're getting reports that the Starmaker is under attack. Five ships of unknown design, possibly alien, are firing at it. Its accompanying fleet is turning to intercept, but the ships are getting through. They're too fast to catch and are firing directly on it, and . . .

It looks like the Starmaker is trying to disengage, but I think something's wrong with the star. It's turning it brighter and increasing its size. I repeat, it's –

<crackle>

Oh. Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma-ha-tát . . . I think the star just exploded. The Starmaker clearly warped away in time, but we've lost all contact with our camera pods and we're receiving no signal from the warships that accompanied it. That's . . .

We're going to go to commercial, now.

In the far-flung future of humanity, the strange, barely understood science of the Starmaker has changed everything. The ability to alter the nature of a star in a matter of hours, or less, can turn systems inhabitable, and save others from certain doom. But the destructive possibilities of its technology are staggering, especially in the wrong hands.

That's not the only concern about this wonder of the age. Its creator kept the Starmaker's secrets very tight to all five of his chests. Now that he is dead, others have found a way to keep it going, but they don't know what's lurking underneath its metal shell.

The answers might surprise them . . . and kill us all.

We are stuck with technology when what we really want is just stuff that works.

> – Douglas Adams, **The Salmon** of Doubt

This wondrous device could be put into any far-future, space-opera campaign where an overpopulated humanity jostles for space, a well-meaning but occasionally overbearing government struggles to keep pace with it, and relations between worlds – and alien neighbors – aren't always so rosy. The known background of the device and its mysterious creator are given, along with information about what the device can do, and possible reasons why it works. Ideas for its use and misuse, and possible adventures for heroes to do with or along-side it are also provided.

#### **NOVEMBER 2011**

# EIDETIC DEBLASTER AND LASER DESIGN BY DAVID L. PULVER

My brother inspired my first attempt at blaster and laser design. He wanted to build a personalized fully automatic snub-nosed energy pistol for his Space Patrol agent Captain Beowulf. Since the interstellar patrol's headquarters was based on Vega, thus was born the antiparticle-spitting Vega Machine Pistol, the sector's most powerful full-automatic handgun.

This is an updated version of this system optimized for *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition.* It's compatible with *GURPS Ultra-Tech,* but can be used without it.

Looks like a Geonosian Beam Weapon. By the Force, this thing is ugly! – RC-1138, in Star Wars: Republic Commando

#### **BEAM WEAPON DESIGN**

This is a customized system for building laser and blaster weapons. The weapon designs should be reasonably similar to their equivalents in *GURPS Ultra-Tech*. (They won't be *identical*, since *Ultra-Tech*'s weapons were balanced against each other rather than built using design rules.)

#### Tech Level

Choose a TL for the weapon; it may be TL9 to TL12. Decide if the weapon will incorporate superscience (TL^) technology.

*Example:* This will be a TL12 beam weapon. It's a handgun for the galactic police, to be known as the Vega Machine Pistol. It won't incorporate superscience technology. The goal is to

design an easily concealed but devastating weapon for undercover Space Patrol officers.

#### Beam

Select the type of beam, within the limits of the weapon's TL. Force and graviton beams are *always* superscience. Other beams can incorporate superscience (e.g., a "TL9<sup>^</sup> super laser" or "TL10<sup>^</sup> super blaster") if desired; this will make the weapon twice as powerful as it would be otherwise.

For explanations of damage modifiers, see pp. B104-105 and B111.

*Laser* (TL9): A high-energy laser fires a beam of coherent light, usually in near-infrared frequency. It inflicts tight-beam burning damage with a (2) armor divisor. For more details, see *High-Energy Laser* in *Ultra-Tech* (pp. 114-115).

*Force Beam* (TL10<sup>^</sup>): These are tightly focused gravitic beams that deliver a powerful kinetic impact. Force beams inflict crushing damage with the double knockback modifier. They can also be set to stun, delivering a beam with a wider impact; on "stun" the beam has no wounding effect (no HP are lost), but it still has its usual double knockback modifier. For additional details, see *Force Beams* in *Ultra-Tech* (pp. 128-129).

*Blaster* (TL10/11\*): A blaster fires a bolt of ionized charged particles at relativistic velocities. It inflicts tight-beam burning damage with a (5) armor divisor and the surge damage modifier. In vacuum, the charged particles repel each other, so Acc is halved and it has only 20% range. For extra rules, see *Charged Particle Beams ("Blasters")* in *Ultra-Tech* (p. 123).

*Neutral Particle Beam* (TL10/11\*): Similar to a blaster (see above), this is a neutral beam composed of both positively charged ions and electrons. It inflicts tight-beam burning damage with surge and radiation modifiers, but won't work in atmosphere. However, at the flip of a switch, it can reconfigure to fire a blaster beam with identical stats except using half the power (giving it twice as many shots in this mode).

*Rainbow Laser* (TL11): This type of laser fires a nanosecond pulse that is focused through interaction with the atmosphere into a needle-thin beam of polychromatic light. It inflicts tight-beam burning damage with a (3) armor divisor. The beam only focuses properly in a very thin to superdense atmosphere; in vacuum or trace conditions, it has 10% range and no armor divisor. See also *Rainbow Lasers* in *Ultra-Tech* (pp. 116-117).

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Units with additional tools, the ability to interpret alien software, or other functions requested by the purchaser can reach up to \$500. LC is typically 6, although, in some settings, paranoid governments may give it LC3 due to the monowire edge on the cutting blade. Schools, hospitals, and ports may restrict or forbid the carrying of the tool, classifying it as a weapon due to the presence of a cutting blade on it.

Used as a weapon, the monowire blade does sw+1d(10) cutting damage with Reach C, 1.

#### **ULTRA-FUTON (TL9)**

This is a pretty standard item of furniture, known by scores of names in any culture it is found in. It comes in various sizes, typically sized for a small child, a medium child, a small adult, two adults, or two adults with lots of extra room. The device includes a small processor able to read and interpret the user's body language as he tries to become comfortable; this device alters the firmness and temperature of its cushions in response to the comfort level of the user, ensuring the user experiences complete relaxation at all times while using the bed. Almost all such units have small motors enabling them to change their configuration between a bed, a lounge chair, or a couch. The mattress is kept in place by thousands of tiny grippers, and never slides off the frame. The mattress changes its dimensions to accommodate the current arrangement of the frame. The units include the effects of responsive beds (*Ultra-Tech*, p. 69).

*Small Ultra-Futon* (TL9): Suitable for a child. \$700, 140 lbs. LC6.

*Medium Ultra-Futon* (TL9): Suitable for a human teenager; seats two as a love seat. \$800, 160 lbs. LC6.

*Large Ultra-Futon* (TL9): Suitable for a human adult; seats three as a couch. \$1,000, 180 lbs. LC6.

*Double Ultra-Futon* (TL9): Suitable for two human adults; seats four as a couch. \$1,250, 200 lbs. LC6.

*Queen-Sized Ultra-Futon* (TL9): Suitable for two human adults with a bit of extra space; seats five as a couch. \$1,500, 250 lbs. LC6.

*King-Sized Ultra-Futon* (TL9): Suitable for two human adults with a lot of extra space; seats six as a couch. \$2,000, 300 lbs. LC6.

*Survival Feature:* Add +50% to cost, +20% to weight. The mattress can provide adequate heating and cooling (+3 HT rolls

#### **Adventure Seeds**

*Check His Pockets!* Modern-day protagonists come across a crashed spacecraft from an advanced culture (several TLs above their own). Among the items that remain functional are some of the devices described above. The adventure begins as the investigators try to discover how these devices function . . . but the real adventure might be in hanging on to them, or finding applications for them.

*Devil's Due:* The adventurers are hired to transport "a load of furniture" to a distant and ultra-conservative planet. The furniture in question is a load of ultra-futons. The destination has no particular laws against the cargo, and the merchants easily offload their cargo. However, shortly after the first purchases are made, the group finds out that "the Committee for the Prevention of Vice" is looking to have a . . . conversation . . . with them.

*Get It All Back:* The party is contacted by a space faring agency of their culture, such as the patrol or the navy. They are offered the contract to check on a scientific outpost on a primitive planet that has fallen out of contact. They are to rescue survivors, recover technological equipment, bring home bodies, etc., as required to minimize contamination of the native culture. When they arrive, the "hidden" outpost has been raided, and the household and personal items of the missing scientists have been traded far and wide by the locals.

*Keep the Secret:* A wealthy and prestigious civilian organization has contacted the adventurers, offering a large sum to recover some missing household items. One of the organization's officers has absconded with a shipment of everyday goods, set up house on a pre-spaceflight world, and is preparing to "invent" the stolen items to become wealthy. The organization wants no official involvement, wants all of the items recovered, and does not care about the fate of its missing officer – so long as neither the natives nor the authorities get to talk to him.

to resist injury due to a hot or cold environment); this works for (4 + TL) hours if the bed does not have an outside power source.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Alan Leddon lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where he spends far too few hours per week involved in roleplaying games. He passes the wasted nongaming hours in pointless pursuits including working, sleeping, and talking to strange people in black outfits who call themselves "Mr. Smith" and "Mr. Jones."

Alan is saving up toward his next home, which will feature a balcony over the gaming room, from which Alan will GM. He is looking forward to the day when he can look down upon his players and thunder, "Thou shalt roll a Fright Check at -2!"

Science fiction, outside of poetry, is the only literary field which has no limits, no parameters whatsoever. – Theodore Sturgeon

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• In the United States, the increased affordability of automobiles and the omnipresence of cheap gasoline led to the rise of the suburbs (since people could more easily live away from the city), which in turn led to urban deterioration.

• The invention of air conditioning allowed people to live in previously undesirable climates.

• As an ancient example, the fact that most weapons are used right-handed likely led to the common gesture of shaking of hands (most commonly the right hand) as a sign of peace; if two people are using their right hands as a greeting, they aren't able to attack!

#### THE FUTURE WAS WEIRD WHEN IT GOT HERE ...

One easy way to use this idea in gaming is to consider the implications of specific inventions – not their *current* effect, but the effect they had on the setting as they evolved and progressed. Look at the list of "ultra-tech" technology that you want to have in your campaign, and choose a few elements that seem like they could have an interesting history. For each one, consider what that technology would have been like when *first* invented . . . and what that implies for the setting as a whole.

#### Number Games

Imagine a space campaign with reasonably fast interstellar travel (say, jump gates) and faster FTL communications. The heroes will be able to get messages from afar, but getting actual backup will be a while in coming.

Now, let's imagine the trajectory that FTL might have taken. Looking at the history of telecommunications, speed has increased, enabling more complex messages as time has gone by. Today, it takes less time to download a high-def YouTube video than it took to send a telegraph of a few words; what if a similar mechanic started at the beginning of the FTL-radio era?

What if the first FTL radio communications were mindbogglingly expensive and/or slow . . . say, one digit per hour. In the early days of this system, it would be essential to come up with a communication method that would enable maximum possibility of a message being successfully received.

In this setting, scientists would have come up with a method of communication that increased the possibility of a successful transmission and mitigated the effects of an unsuccessful one. One method they might have devised is:

#### All communication is done via two-digit codes (at least at first). A single zero is reserved to initiate or end communication.

Assign each ship in the fleet a two-digit number that doesn't contain any even digits. (These digits might also do double-duty; for example, "11" might mean "captain," "13" might mean "second-in-command," etc.). Then, come up with a list of the most common or likely communication situations using two-digit numbers that contain only even digits (and no zeros). Here are a few examples.

**22:** Mission achieved; all objectives accomplished.

- **24:** Most mission objectives accomplished; may be a problem or follow-up required.
- 26: Mission successful, but with complications.

**28:** Proceed/continue.

42: Hold.

- 44: Mission still in progress.
- **46:** Mission in progress, but tending positive.
- **48:** Mission in progress, but tending negative.

62: Mission or objective failed; not salvageable.

64: Mission or objective failed; could be salvageable.

**88:** Return to point of origin.

Thus a "communication" (in 24 characters) might resemble:

011440 ("Ship 11 is working on its mission. It's neither trending good or bad.")

0280 ("Continue.")

0112413640 ("Ship 11 has finished its mission, but there may be follow-up required. Something bad but salvageable has happened to our second-in-command.")

0880 ("Don't pursue the matter further. Come on home.")

Extrapolating this, there can only be 25 "named" ships in the fleet (at least at first). This should be fine; if we assume that FTL ships are expensive or controlled, we don't need many for the earliest days of exploration. In fact, if we limit it to *prime* numbers, then we have 12 possible ship "names."

Now, as the campaign's history evolved to its "present," we can easily assume that FTL communications eventually improved; communications might increase to four digits an hour, then four digits a second, etc. Eventually it gets to whatever level we want the campaign to be at (whether full video transmission or "Twitter 2525"). However, by imagining the backwards trajectory and projecting it to the present, we have any number of interesting holdovers from the earlier era that can continue to influence the "modern" setting:

• Ships are still given prime-digit "names." ("These are the voyages of the starship *Thirty-Three Thirteen.*") Officers are still referred to via their numbers in some instances.

• Many "holdover" codes remain a part of common language: "Captain, I think I'd call this a 22." "A-yep. Let's 88 outta here." In particular, "zero" is a great conversation starter and ender. ("Zero, Tara! Good to see you!" "Great to see you! I can't talk now; I have to run. Zero!")

• If the FTL communication evolved fast enough that there are still people who remember the "old days," there's probably a social brevity in those who got used to the quiet and terseness of the initial days. ("I just got a 32-word report from Admiral Shin." "Wow . . . he's chatty today.")

Hopefully, this one worked example can give you additional ideas of how society can be shaped by seemingly unrelated technological advances. As homework, consider what might happen if the first-generation replicators only created red objects (red would probably be seen as a "copycat" or inferior color), or if the first-generation portable laser weapons required a full palmprint to activate (weapons and fighting techniques would probably evolve to fit that requirement, remaining even once the requirement faded away).

#### **About the Editor**

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

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*GURPS* rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, *Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book.

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