

BESM

SPACE FANTASY SPACE FANTASY



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BESM Space Fantasy looks at the science fiction genre known as “space fantasy” or “space opera” by describing its most important elements and how they are used. More than that, it supplies guidelines for GMs who wish to design campaigns or adventures that use space opera characters or situations. This book also provides new rules for character creation, technology, and combat (including space battles) to help GMs create memorable tales of intergalactic heroism and villainy, whether they take place a long time ago or in the far future. Chock full of excellent genre analysis and gorgeous anime art, *BESM Space Fantasy* is the essential anime role-playing tool for your galactic campaigns.



BESM SPACE FANTASY

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SPACE OPERA VS. SPACE FANTASY

"I thought this book was called *BESM Space Opera*. What's up with the name change?"

An interesting story, that. We originally planned to call this book *BESM Space Opera* since it's a sourcebook for the space opera genre. But one day we received a letter from the lawyers for Fantasy Games Unlimited, forbidding us to use *Space Opera* in the title of our book. FGU published an RPG called *Space Opera* way back in 1981, and believe that they hold a trademark on that title. We don't think their request is reasonable since they haven't registered the trademark (in fact, one can't trademark the title of a book in the US), their book is over two decades old, and there certainly wouldn't be any confusion between the two products. Their lawyer made it very clear to us, however, that they would pursue further action if we used *Space Opera* for the title. We think our time is better spent creating books than debating legal issues, and in the end decided to change the title and move on.

So welcome to *BESM Space Fantasy* — your anime guide to the space opera genre.

CHAPTER I: WHAT IS SPACE FANTASY?



WHAT IS SPACE FANTASY?

BESM Space Fantasy deals with a genre more commonly known as “space opera” — derived from “horse opera,” which was a genre of melodramatic Western radio shows produced in the first half of the 20th century. In these horse operas, the good guys wore white, the bad guys wore black, and there was never any angst over the mistreatment of Native Americans. These radio shows were simple both in terms of their morality and their plots. Yet, they proved very popular with their listeners, many of whom yearned for that mythical “simpler time” when men were men, women were women, and a well-used six-gun could solve any problem.

Initially, “space opera” was applied to any science fiction story that took its inspiration from these horse operas by transferring their simplistic morality and linear plots into the future — or at least outer space. Soon, the space opera became staples of pulp magazines, where the majority of these stories were first published. Writers thrilled their fans with exciting futuristic yarns, such as E. E. “Doc” Smith’s *Lensmen* series, which proved immensely popular with readers of the pulps. In fact, the genre became so popular that most of the science fiction films produced between the 1930’s and 1950’s (and even the into early 1960’s) were space operas in one form or another. Serials like *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* exemplify the genre, with square-jawed heroes, beautiful heroines, dastardly villains, and rocket-finned spacecraft that go “whoosh” even in the vacuum of space.

Like all successful genres, space opera eventually transcended its humble beginnings, transforming itself — and all science fiction — in the process. As new science fiction genres came into their own in the 1960’s, “space opera” was used to refer specifically to any science fiction story of epic proportions, in which huge starships, galactic empires, federations, heroes, and villains took centre stage. Melodrama was another important component of space opera tales and one of the reasons the genre remained immensely popular, despite its no longer being synonymous with science fiction as it once was. Like the horse operas before them, space operas exulted in their outlandish plots and over the top action.

Although simplistic in many ways, space operas were not necessarily simple-minded. They often included genuine — if somewhat muddled — scientific speculation. Many readers were first introduced to the effects of space travel (weightlessness, for example) through these films and stories, in addition to many other aspects of modern science. Furthermore, space opera slowly began to open readers’ minds to the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe, even if it is unlikely such life will be hawk-men or rubbery-looking lizards. The popularity of space opera laid the groundwork for the general popularity of science fiction in contemporary Western (and Japanese) culture. In many ways, science fiction is the mythology of the present age and has become an essential part of modern storytelling.

Nevertheless, some writers and fans used “space opera” as a term of derision for any science fiction story they considered unbelievable or poorly conceived. “New Wave” science

fiction appeared in the mid-1960's and briefly relegated space opera to the literary sidelines — but not for long. The popularity of space opera remained, especially in the mass market. Writers like Isaac Asimov continued to spin space opera tales and television shows like *Star Trek* introduced the genre to a new generation. Less than a decade later, *Star Wars* was released to eager audiences the world over. Explicitly drawing on nostalgia for the space opera serials of old, *Star Wars* cemented the genre's hold on the popular imagination. In the decades since, numerous novels, movies, and television series have followed in its footsteps and guaranteed that space opera would prosper well into the 21st century.

HISTORY OF ANIME SPACE OPERA

From its beginning, anime has had a strong science fictional element. The very first anime series, *Tetsuwan Atom* (or *Astro Boy* in the West) concerned a scientist who built a robot in the image of his dead son. Produced in 1963, the series set off an anime boom and firmly established the connection between science fiction and anime. That connection mostly took the form of robots or giant robots, however, exemplified by *Brave Rydeen* and *Mazinger*, among others, in the early 1970's.

Around the same time, science fiction series began to appear that offered more than just giant robots. The first of these was *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*, known in English variously as *G-Force* or *Battle of the Planets*. Produced in 1972, this series is notable both for its use of a team of complementary heroes and its episodic nature, as well as its use of melodrama — a key element of space opera.

Just two years later, another important milestone in anime space opera occurred with the release of *Uchu Senkan Yamato* (or *Space Battleship Yamato*), known in English as *Star Blazers*. This series became an international success for several reasons. Not only did it adopt many explicit space opera elements (such as the defence of Earth against alien invaders), but it was released in the United States just in time to take advantage the resurgence of interest in the genre after the premier of *Star Wars* in 1977. From that point on, space opera became an increasingly significant anime genre, whether on its own or in conjunction with other genres such as mecha, sentai, or even exotic girlfriend.

The late 1970's and the early 1980's were a boom time for anime in general, with many new series being produced and distributed, both for the Japanese and North American markets. Unsurprisingly, space opera was at the forefront of this burst of creative energy. Among these were *Space Pirate Captain Harlock*, *Galaxy Express 999*, and *Queen of 1,000 Years*. These series, however, paled in comparison to two others that would firmly establish both space opera and mecha as quintessential anime genres: *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Superdimensional Fortress Macross*.

Mobile Suit Gundam combined a sprawling story of an interstellar war with the use of giant robots as armoured fighting vehicles for human pilots. Appearing in 1979, the series

is a classic of anime science fiction in the way it combines the melodrama of space opera with an intelligent storyline and amazing visuals. A few years later, *Superdimensional Fortress Macross* used a similar formula with equally great success. The interpersonal relationships between its cast of many characters proved just as compelling to its viewers as the epic storyline of humanity's fight against alien invaders. *Macross* followed in the footsteps of *Star Blazers* by becoming a hit in North America as well, although it did so in conjunction with two other space opera series *Southern Cross* and *Mospeada*. The three unrelated anime were stitched together and released as *Robotech* and served to introduce yet another generation of North Americans to anime.

The mid- to late-1980's saw an explosion of anime space operas. Although many of them employed mecha as significant story elements, not all of them did so. With access to the wider North American market, Japanese animators were able to take risks and explore new settings and themes. Some stayed true to the older tradition of space opera (even creating an anime version of the *Lensmen* series) or produced remakes and sequels to popular series from previous years. Others broke out in bold new directions by taking advantage of developments in science fiction, such as cyberpunk.

This experimentation and diversification wrought changes on the space opera genre. Already intertwined (sometimes inseparably so) with the mecha genre, the late 1980's and early 1990's saw space opera elements appear in unexpected places, such as gun bunnies, exotic girlfriend, and comedy series. *Tenchi Muyo*, for example, took the standard exotic girlfriend genre to new heights by using the protagonist's many female companions to embroil the title character in galactic intrigue, right down to alien kingdoms, space pirates, and a galactic police force. Other series, such as *Cowboy Bebop* and *Original Dirty Pair* also used space opera elements to add spice to their tales of bounty hunters and gun bunnies, proving the resiliency and flexibility of the genre.

Why has space opera proven so durable in anime? It has done so for many of the same reasons it survived the death of the pulp magazines and the evolution of literary science fiction. First and foremost, space opera is fun, escapist storytelling. In many cases, it has more to do with fantasy than with "hard" science fiction. Space opera simply uses science fiction elements, such as starships and aliens, in the same way fantasy uses dragons and elves — because they are familiar. Living in the 21st century, most people understand the basic elements of space opera. They have been used and reused for decades and are now part of the common language of popular culture. Space opera takes advantage of this familiarity to create "fairytales of the future" that can be every bit as powerful and compelling as the old legends that enthralled our ancestors. There is little wonder that anime has long had a love affair with the genre.

Of course, there is more to it than this. Space opera's emphasis on melodrama and interpersonal relationships is readymade for anime, where both of these are common elements in many different genres, not just science fictional ones. Likewise, the epic storylines and fast-paced action perfectly suit anime sensibilities, where big starships and even bigger explosions can be brought to life in glorious colour. Space opera necessarily includes all manner of advanced technology and alien worlds. These too have long been commonplace in anime. In so many ways, space opera and anime seem made for one another. Animation allows space opera to tell fantastic stories of galactic heroism that would be impossible (or at least prohibitively expensive) in traditional movies, while space opera pushes animation to new heights of inventiveness. While perhaps not the foremost genre of anime, space opera remains a major one now — just as it has been since the medium's earliest days.

USING THIS SUPPLEMENT

BESM Space Fantasy is a source book for *Big Eyes, Small Mouth (BESM)*. It looks at the science fiction genre known as “space fantasy” or “space opera” by describing its most important elements and how they are used. More than that, it supplies guidelines for GMs who wish to design campaigns or adventures that use space opera characters or situations. This book also provides new rules for character creation, technology, and combat (including space battles) to help GMs create memorable tales of intergalactic heroism and villainy, whether they take place a long time ago or in the far future.

Of course, *BESM Space Fantasy* can be valuable even in games that do not involve evil galactic empires or going where no one has gone before. Space opera elements, such as aliens, robots, and starships, are found in many other anime genres. There is considerable crossover between the mecha and space opera genres, for example. Therefore, GMs and players of other genres may find the expanded rules and guidelines presented here useful for other *BESM* campaigns.

This supplement looks at the creation of a *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign, providing advice on the numerous elements that must be considered rather than presenting a complete setting, with all the elements already outlined. If GMs are interested in an excellent anime space opera setting, with all the design elements already set in place, *Centauri Knights* (#02-103; ISBN 1-894525-13-2) is an excellent campaign setting of hard sci-fi space opera.

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CHAPTER 2: CAMPAIGN STYLES



Like the anime series from which they draw inspiration, *BESM* space opera games can come in a variety of styles, each of which emphasises a different aspect of the genre. Here are some of the possibilities:

ACTION

Almost by definition, space opera games are action-oriented. Heroic deeds and epic battles have been essential elements of the genre in all its forms. Even so, some forms of space opera place great stock in action, using it as the primary means to drive plots and motivate characters. Combat — whether personal or in spacecraft — are common in these forms of space opera. Duels with villains and set-piece battles, rather than investigation or introspection, are the means by which action stories advance from one scene to the next. Just as important are other types of physical dangers or obstacles, such as hazardous alien environments or deadly extraterrestrial life forms. Action-oriented space opera therefore focuses on the potential bodily harm that the heroes and their allies might suffer should they fail in their missions. Action stories are also fast-paced and rarely bog down in details unless they are necessary for the plot.

This is not to say that action games are mindless. Many action-oriented space operas have sophisticated plots and fully fleshed out characters. Simply because action is important does not mean that other elements are not also present, even prominently so. Those other elements, however, exist to further the action of the story rather than being ends in themselves. For example, a space pirate's troubled youth on a frontier world not only makes for excellent background, but it likewise provides the GM with story hooks that allow him or her to create action scenes, such as when the pirate returns home to find the planet ravaged by Imperial Marines. In the end, action is paramount and everything else exists to facilitate exciting scenes full of daring exploits and battles against the odds.

DRAMA

Dramatic stories also have a long association with space opera, perhaps due to the genre's moralistic tendencies. Often, space opera plots revolve around the characters' having to make difficult choices with far-reaching consequences. Drama is also a function of the epic scale of many space opera stories. Saving an entire planet — or galaxy — from invasion by hostile aliens is a typical space opera plot, as are rebellions against tyrannical dictatorships. With plots like these, the stakes are incredibly high and failure can lead to death and destruction on a vast scale. Dramatic games can easily become cerebral and angst-ridden, which is why they are often combined with other styles in order to avoid such excesses.

Of course, many dramatic games are actually melodramatic. Melodrama is distinguished from ordinary drama by its emphasis on exaggerated emotions and interpersonal conflict. This too has a long association with space opera. Anime space operas are rife with melodrama, as anyone familiar with *Star Blazers* or *Macross* is aware. Melodrama not only provides fodder for plots, but it also grounds the titanic struggles of the genre in everyday experiences that make them easier to comprehend. If the GM

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is looking to create a long-lasting campaign rather than a shorter one, melodrama is an excellent style to choose.

COMEDY

In spite of — or perhaps because of — its vast scope, space opera can be a good vehicle for comedic stories. Comedy can work in many different ways, any one of which can be transferred to a space opera game with some care. One way is to use this style as a counterbalance to the seriousness of a plot. For example, a futuristic doctor searching for a cure to a virulent interstellar plague might have a morbid sense of humour that belies the gravity of his situation. Another way is to poke fun at the conventions and clichés of the genre, by having a ludicrously large starship or an outlandish mystical philosophy. Since space opera is, to some extent, defined by its conventions (even when they are being explicitly rejected), this type of comedy is easier to accomplish.

It is also possible to create an entirely comedic space opera game, one whose very foundations are somewhat ridiculous or outright funny. Such games would be hard to sustain over the long term, since they can easily degenerate into farce. More likely, an otherwise serious campaign could have prominent comedic elements, such as a race of mechanically inept alien inventors or a starship whose star drive regularly breaks down at inopportune times. The *Tenchi Muyo* series are good examples of using comedic elements in a space opera setting.

ROMANCE

Romance often goes hand in hand with melodrama, so it is not surprising that many space opera stories include a romantic element. Protagonists are motivated by love as often as they are by other ideals. Moreover, the fairytale quality of some space operas — complete with alien princesses and galactic kingdoms — make it easy to see why romance is an important style for the genre. Anime space opera is no different in this regard. If anything, there is probably a greater occurrence of romantic themes, since they are a good way to maintain viewer interest and ensure series longevity.

The primary difficulty with romantic games is that they can demand a great deal from both the GM and the players. Both must be comfortable with the style, as well as able to trust one another to treat the subject matter in a fashion that appeals to everyone. Beyond that, romantic space opera games need to strike a balance between overindulgence and cursory-treatment. To take full advantage of this style, romance should be more than window dressing but not the only significant element of the game. The GM can never forget that “space” is just as important as “opera.”

MIXED

Most space opera games will not use “pure” styles. They will mix and match, taking elements from multiple styles while emphasising one as its primary focus. That is only

fitting, since space opera is itself a hybrid genre that freely takes its inspiration from a variety of sources. Elements of action, drama, and romance are common in most space opera anime series and more than a few also employ humour as well. A GM would be wise to do the same, particularly if he or she wishes to create a long-lasting or open-ended space opera campaign. A quick look at the bibliography of *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* will reveal that most of the series designated as space operas include another genre (or genres) as well. There is no reason why the GM should be any more restricted in his or her choices than the anime series.

CAMPAIGN CONCEPTS

Just as space opera comes in several styles, each with its advantages, disadvantages, and unique elements, there are also many space opera concepts as well. A concept is the basic premise of the game — the reason that the characters all work together doing whatever it is that they do. A concept is therefore the unifying element that brings together all the diverse parts that make up the campaign. Like styles, concepts need not be completely restrictive. Many space opera games will straddle multiple concepts or will vacillate between more than one over the course of time. The latter is especially true in long-lasting campaigns, whose focus may change. Even so, most games will use only a single concept and stick to it in order to ensure consistency and continuity from adventure to adventure. A few of the most common concepts are:

To Go Boldly

Due to the debt they owed to the Western genre, space opera stories often postulated a wide-open frontier, where brave men and women explored unknown worlds and interacted with new life and new civilisations. These stories assumed that humanity would one day leave the cradle of Earth and seek new planets to conquer and colonise, just as Europeans did after Columbus discovered the New World. Exploration holds great potential for action and excitement, since new worlds may be home to unexpected — and deadly — dangers. Of course, exploring the unknown is very much like unravelling a great mystery, allowing for stories that are more cerebral as well. Finally, there is no question that exploration has a romantic component as well. Explorers are usually seen as idealistic people with grand visions, who risk everything to broaden the horizons of the societies from which they come — in other words, perfect heroes.

Broadly speaking, interstellar explorers come in two varieties: sponsored and independent. Sponsored explorers are members of an organisation, typically governmental or military, whose primary responsibility is charting new planets and reporting findings to a central authority. Other types of sponsors exist too, such as corporations or private groups of one sort or another. In the end, what is important is that the sponsor provides the explorers with resources and equipment — including their starship — to travel to the stars on their mission. Independent explorers, on the other hand, are beholden to no one.

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They operate entirely of their own accord, travelling where they wish when they wish and for their own reasons. Unlike sponsored explorers, independents must supply their own equipment, which is why they usually lack the impressive hardware their sponsored counterparts typically possess.

In both literary and anime space opera, sponsored explorers are by far the more common. It is easy to understand why. From a storytelling perspective, sponsored explorers have certain distinct advantages. First, the sponsor provides a ready rationale as to why the characters are asked to explore a particular world or make contact with a particular alien race. Neither the GM nor the players needs to come up with a justification for visiting Epsilon Eridani III beyond “the Interstellar Scout Service has given us orders.” The responsibility of choosing worlds to visit falls entirely outside player control, which makes it much easier for the GM to plan adventures in advance, since he knows exactly where the explorers are headed beforehand. Admittedly, even sponsored explorers may have some leeway in determining where to turn their attention, especially in settings where faster than light communications do not exist or are unreliable. In such cases, the captain of an exploratory craft may have a great deal to say about where his crew will focus their attention. Even so, sponsored explorers are usually given directives from their sponsors that guide their actions, which still gives the GM something to use as a guidepost for planning adventures.

Sponsored explorers also have two others advantages as the basis for a role-playing game. The first was briefly mentioned above, namely that the sponsoring organisation



provides the characters with all the resources and equipment they need. In games based around this premise, neither the players nor the GM need to spend much time keeping track of ammunition or fuel or any other such minutiae. Unless there is a dramatically appropriate reason for it not to be the case, the GM can assume the characters always have the equipment they need for the job at hand. They may have to fill out a requisition form or ask permission from their superiors, but they should rarely lack for, say, a blaster pistol when they head down to explore an unknown planet. The other advantage is that the existence of a sponsoring organisation provides an excellent explanation of why the characters all serve aboard the same starship, despite the diversity that typically exists in any group of characters. Since they are all members of the Takamatsu Corporation's Exploratory Bureau, for example, it only makes sense for them to work together.

Sponsored explorers have disadvantages too. In fact, many of this concept's advantages are also disadvantages, depending on how one looks at them. For instance, the presence of a chain of command can be problematic. The captain of the exploration vessel may have little input in where his ship goes, which takes initiative out of his or her hands. Likewise, the players of characters who serve under him or her may chafe at having to take orders from a fellow player. Another possible problem is that sponsoring organisation may have strict standards about its personnel and their behaviour. This too may limit player action, as well as player creativity. Some types of characters might be declared off-limits, since they would not easily fit within the framework of the sponsoring organisation. An alien missionary or a runaway psychic, for example, might be unsuitable in a game where the characters are all members of the Imperial Naval Expeditionary Force of a tyrannical empire.

Independent explorers also have their share of advantages and disadvantages. Flexibility and openness are the two primary advantages of this sort of game. Independent explorers can come from anywhere or be anything. Almost no character concept is too outlandish to include, since independents must abide by no standards except their own. In a similar vein, independent explorers can go anywhere they like. They follow their own path and are not bound by the directives of their superiors, since they have none. The freewheeling and rootless nature of independence makes it very attractive to many players and GMs, who appreciate the unconstrained nature of the game.

This lack of restrictions can also be a drawback. Independent explorers have no necessary rationale for doing anything. Instead, they must provide their own. Why do they explore? Are they simply dilettante adventurers seeking their fortunes amid the stars or do they have a broader agenda? Perhaps they are defeated rebels seeking out a new home for themselves and their allies in a time of galactic civil war. Perhaps they are thrill-seekers who want to leave behind the dreary uniformity of the decadent Interstellar Commonwealth. There are many possible answers to these questions, but both the players and the GM need to find them. Without these answers, a space opera game will lack coherence and lose focus. There must also be an explanation of why the characters — some of whom may be quite unusual — have chosen to work together as explorers. What unites them

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in this mission? Finally, independent explorers often lack the resources of their sponsored counterparts. That means that repairs, finding spare parts, scrounging for equipment, and other such activities may become important. If neither the GM nor the players wish to spend much time with these matters, they should consider either glossing over them or some reason why they are not a concern (such as easily accessible nanotechnology).

Whether sponsored or independent, exploration is an excellent concept for a *BESM* space opera game. By operating far from galactic civilisation, the characters are free from many restrictions (although not all) that get in the way of exciting stories. Likewise, the characters will regularly encounter the unknown and the unexpected. The GM can therefore use all sorts of weird aliens or interstellar phenomena as the basis for his or her adventures, since they are precisely what explorers hope to find. After all, if the galaxy did not hold many mysteries, what would be the point in sending explorers out into it?

STAR SOLDIERS

Military stories are almost as common in space opera as exploration stories, perhaps even more so. They are very common in anime, with many series, such as *Macross*, *Mobile Suit Gundam*, and *Star Blazers*, for example, whose main characters are soldiers or mercenaries. It is very easy to understand why military stories are so popular in the genre. They provide an excellent rationale for action-oriented stories in which heroism — and violence — are the most obvious means to resolve a conflict. Military stories also provide an excuse to introduce powerful weapons, armour, and starships. In fact, many of the staples of anime, such as mecha, find their origin in military stories, since militaries are often the source of cutting-edge equipment, even in contemporary society. Consequently, military games will have plenty of flashy technological devices, all of which exist to tell thrilling stories of battle among the stars.

Military games have many of the same advantages and disadvantages as exploration games. They can, for instance, come in two basic varieties. Sponsored soldiers are members of legitimate militaries, such as the Federation Marines or Terran Self-Defence Force, while independent soldiers are probably mercenaries of some sort. Both types have long associations with space opera. As one might expect, the benefits and drawbacks of sponsorship and independence are no different in a military game than in an exploratory one. For the most part, they are the same. The primary difference is that sponsored soldiers are probably even more restricted in their freedom of action than sponsored explorers. That is because most sponsors will want to keep a tight rein on their troops, lest they abuse their powers and wreak greater havoc on the universe. Of course, some sponsors might allow a lot of discretion to their soldiers. A dictatorial empire, for instance, might let its dreaded shock troops conduct raids or launch assaults of their own recognisance — all the better to spread fear and terror throughout the galaxy. For the most part, though, such behaviour will be the exception rather than the rule. Even independent mercenaries will regularly find themselves constrained, since all but the most anarchic of societies will look askance at undirected violence.

In space opera, “star soldiers” can come in a variety of forms, not all of whom are ground troops. In fact, the technological level of space opera is such that just as many star soldiers are pilots or naval officers as are classic grunts. Fighter pilots, in particular are popular figures in space opera. In anime, pilots often control giant robots, while in literary space opera they control starfighters of one sort or another. Before undertaking a military game, the GM and the players should consider on which type of soldiers they wish to focus, since they all have their unique characteristics. Ground troops, for example, see lots of personal combat, but lack the mobility that naval officers do. Pilots have an elite reputation and are much admired by their peers, but they require good excuses to become involved in adventures on a planet’s surface. This is not to say that the choice the GM makes will forever bar certain types of adventure themes or settings — far from it! After all, space opera plays fast and loose with realism. It is more interested in epic stories and exciting action. If it serves the interest of the story to get His Majesty’s Own Aldebaran Mecha Regiment to the other side of the galaxy to fight off a sneak attack by the Krabulon Horde, a resourceful GM can always find a justification for doing so. Still, it never hurts to consider whether the characters will be hard-bitten ground pounders of the Martian Alliance Army or haughty fighter jocks of the Aerospace Control Command, since that consideration will create a general framework for the game as a whole (even if it occasionally deviates from it).

Another consideration in a military game is whether the setting is at war or at peace. That is, does the game begin with the galaxy embroiled in a decades long struggle between the Human League and the Xharen Hegemony, or has there been no major war since the foundation of the Republic? While it might seem strange to consider a military game in a galaxy at peace, there are good reasons for it. For example, if the GM is more interested in low-scale conflicts than in intergalactic Armageddon, a generally pacific setting might make sense. Perhaps the GM wants the game to focus on Star Union peacekeepers rather than regular soldiers. Alternately, a peaceful galaxy might serve only as a prelude to an interstellar conflict that occurs later — a taste of what the characters are fighting for and what they stand to lose if they fail. In the end, nearly all military games need to bear such things in mind, if only to provide a background against which to place the glory and the horror of galactic warfare.

SPACE PIRATES

A variation on the typical star soldier game is the space pirate game. It too has a long association with space opera. In fact, one of the more famous anime space operas is *Space Pirate Captain Harlock*, which (not surprisingly) told the story of a heroic space pirate on the frontiers of the galaxy. In the genre, space pirates come in two varieties, not unlike ordinary pirates. The first is the dastardly villain, who preys upon starships by raiding them for their valuable cargoes and passengers. This type of pirate is almost always used as an antagonist rather than as a protagonist, although there are occasional exceptions to this rule. The second type is a heroic rebel who has forsaken galactic society and taken up a life of crime

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in order to survive. The aforementioned Captain Harlock is such a space pirate. Though living outside normal society, he is nevertheless an honourable man who abides by his own code of justice that is in many ways superior to that of the society he rejected.

Space pirate games can follow the exploits of either type of pirate, although the heroic rebel is the more attractive for most players. The action of such games focuses on the dark underbelly of galactic society, as the characters interact with an array of colourful — and dangerous — criminals and rogues, not all of whom are as trustworthy as the characters. Many space pirates are not so much heroes as anti-heroes and games involving them should reflect that. While they keep to their own code of honour, they may still be ruthless people who are willing to do whatever it takes to guarantee their future. On the other hand, some pirates may seek to give up their illicit existence and “go legit” once they land one last big score. Alternately, space pirates might lead a swashbuckling existence, in which deeds of derring-do are the rule. As a sub-genre of military games, space pirate games usually include plenty of action and combat, both on a planet’s surface (with dueling being absolutely essential) and in space (where boarding actions and confrontations with opposing forces are expected).

REBELS AGAINST THE EMPIRE

Another important sub-genre of military games is the rebel game. In this sub-genre, the characters are all members of an armed resistance movement against some enemy force. It is not necessary that the enemy force actually be a totalitarian empire, of course, but it helps. Other possible enemies include megacorporations, religious zealots, or even an army of artificially intelligent machines. In the end, what is important is that the enemy be both numerous and powerful. At the heart of the rebel game is the fight against impossible odds. The characters are outnumbered and outgunned and must call upon all their ingenuity and resourcefulness to eke out a victory against their hated foe. Almost as important, though not essential, is the moral element of the story. The rebels should be sympathetic and their cause just. Otherwise, they are not so much freedom fighters as terrorists, which, while that can make for an interesting story, is atypical in space opera, especially in its anime versions.

Rebel games can vary a great deal, depending on both the nature of the enemy and the level of organisation that exists among the rebel forces. If the rebels are well organised, the characters may well have superiors who give them orders and send them on missions. Such games bear a lot of resemblance to more traditional star soldier games, although specific details obviously differ. If, on the other hand, the rebels are scattered and chaotic, the characters are pretty much left to their own devices. They must chart the course of the rebellion on their own and find a way to unite the various rebels into a unified whole that might have some chance of overthrowing the enemy. *Mospeada* tells the story of a rebellion against an alien invasion of Earth and offers a good example of how a small group of characters might turn the tide against the enemy.

SPACE PATROL

Right alongside explorers and soldiers are interstellar police officers. They have a long association with space opera, with some of the oldest examples of the genre (Smith's *Lensmen* series, for example) being about galactic law enforcement agents. Like both explorers and soldiers, space cops have a fair share of advantages and disadvantages, most of which are the same as the aforementioned genres. Unlike them, however, the space patrol is almost always a sponsored organisation. Independent cops do not really exist in most space opera settings. Generally, these characters work for either a space-faring government agency, such as the Imperial Interstellar Investigations Bureau, or a local authority, like the Memnon V Planetary Police. More rarely, the characters might work for a private organisation, such as Hegenauer Corporate Security, but, even then, they are not truly independent, having to answer to a higher authority for their actions.

The only truly independent law enforcement agents are bounty hunters and private investigators, both of which are commonplace in space opera, especially the former. Bounty hunters are licensed extraordinary agents of justice whose primary responsibility is to find and capture criminals who have jumped bail or fled the jurisdiction of a legitimate legal authority. Bounty hunters undertake their work for pay, which is why many traditional cops look askance at them, considering them little better than mercenaries. This is not at all surprising. Many bounty hunters are somewhat shady characters, employing



dubious methods to bring down their quarry. Bounty hunters also cultivate contacts with the galactic underworld and occasionally do morally questionable work on the side to supplement their tracking of bounties. Consequently, bounty hunters make good anti-heroes (much like space pirates). They can also play the role of melodramatic heroes if, for example, they were driven to this way of life by circumstances, such as going AWOL from the Federation Marine Corps or being accused of a crime they did not commit. The excellent *Cowboy Bebop* provides plenty of ideas for a game based around this concept.

Private investigators share many of the characteristics of bounty hunters, both in terms of their activities and level of respect in the galactic law enforcement community. The differences end there, however. Private eyes are not limited to hunting down criminals on the run. In fact, they can undertake almost any investigation legitimate police officers would, although, like bounty hunters, they do so for money rather than duty. People turn to private eyes when they are desperate or have no other place to go for help — at least in space operas. Consequently, the kinds of investigations these characters take up are often unusual or morally questionable. Sometimes their patrons may themselves be on the wrong side of the law, such as a former lieutenant of the Black Hole Syndicate looking to recover some loot he embezzled from his boss, the interstellar crime lord Maruva Khan. At the same time, private investigators are more likely to be portrayed sympathetically in anime. Many of them are former cops who left the force because they either could not accept the discipline or were offended by the corruption within its ranks. Private eyes are often depicted as rogues with hearts of gold, who forego their payment if the cause is just. This is not always the case, of course, but it is a regular trope that GMs should consider in their own games.

Whatever their nature, law enforcement games can come in many styles. Action and drama are the two most important, but romance and even comedy are possible as well. Action-oriented games focus on the apprehension of dangerous criminals while dramatic games emphasise problem solving and investigation. A romantic interstellar cops game might revolve around the lives and loves of the members of Space Precinct 12 and possess the characteristics of a soap opera. A comedic game, on the other hand, might find humour in the efforts of Star Marshals to deal with the intricate legal system of the Federation, where there are so many safeguards to protect the rights of the accused that navigating them borders on farce. No matter what the style, law enforcement games should never forget that serving and protecting the citizens of a galactic society are the basis for its plots. Consequently, criminal investigations and all that go with them are the core of the sub-genre.

SECRET AGENTS

Sometimes the defence of an interstellar society requires more than simple law enforcement. In some cases, special agents are required — spies. Spies and special operatives are very common in space opera, using the most advanced technologies and espionage techniques to defeat the enemies of the Galactic Republic. Secret agents can

range from the unambiguously good (the Federal Intelligence Agency) to the outright dubious (the Imperial Secret Police). Nevertheless, all such agents are united in using subterfuge and undercover operations to achieve their goals. These men and women work behind the scenes, sometimes violating laws and customs, in order to ensure that their governments are protected from all manner of plots and conspiracies. In space opera, such enemy machinations are typically epic in proportion, such as using an experimental Star Trigger to detonate the sun of the Imperial Throne World or assassinating the Alliance President before he can sign a peace treaty with the Vaxalon Union.

As one might expect, secret agent games are filled with action. Like the novels and movies from which they take inspiration, escaping dangers and overcoming enemies in personal combat are essential elements of this sub-genre. Chases on land, air, sea, and in space are commonplace, as are an array of nefarious henchmen, each one more dangerous than the last and all totally loyal to the evil spymaster who threatens the safety of the galaxy. Dramatic tension arises from many quarters. Sometimes, secret agents must compromise their personal scruples in order to achieve their goals, such as the elimination of scientists whose work is too dangerous to fall into enemy hands. Other times, the agents are forced to choose between honour and duty. This opportunity for romance is great in secret agent games. Many spies, even morally questionable ones, cut rather dashing figures and may prove irresistible to members of the opposite sex (or even the same sex). Moreover, the appeal of someone who is willing to give everything in the defence of his or her home world is undeniable.

Most secret agents are sponsored, working for a government, organisation, or corporation. Even so, they typically have greater freedom of action than explorers, soldiers, or law enforcers. The nature of their assignments demands a high degree of autonomy. Any attempt to micromanage their actions could be disastrous. At the same time, spies are expected to be unswervingly loyal, since their defection could undermine their sponsor's activities and lead to the death of fellow agents. There is some scope for independent spies and troubleshooters. *The Original Dirty Pair*, for example, presents one possible way to use such independent agents in a space opera game.

INTERSTELLAR MERCHANTS

Although common in literary space opera, interstellar merchants are less prevalent in anime. Nevertheless, this sub-genre remains an important one, since it harkens back to colonial eras of Earth, when individuals would travel the world buying and selling trade merchandise in the hope of striking it rich. This sub-genre simply transposes that historical period into outer space. Instead of trading silks and spices, interstellar merchants might seek out Venusian fire wine or the rare tetralithium crystals needed in starship reactor cores. Their motivation remains the same — to become wealthy. For this reason, merchant games are most likely to appeal to players and GMs who find enjoyment in haggling for goods and keeping track of balance sheets. Admittedly, space opera trade usually has very little to do with actual economics, but such considerations should never be too far from the game's

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action. After all, what is the point in playing interstellar merchants if you do not want to keep track of your credits?

In fact, there are many reasons why players or GMs might choose to use interstellar merchants as the basis for their game and yet show little or no interest in keeping track of cash flow. For one, merchants are usually quite independent. The stereotypical space opera merchant is what is known as a “free trader.” He or she owns (or has a mortgage on) a small starship to ply the spacelanes in search of the next big score. Along the way, the merchant finds all sorts of adventures, most of which may have little or nothing to do with trading as such. Trade may serve as the rationale behind why the merchant becomes involved, of course. Trade is used as a dramatic device, such as when he or she tries to find a seller for a rare medicine only to discover that it was manufactured by a megacorporation from the brains of Hyadean whales — an endangered creature protected by the Federation Colonial Office.

Free traders are not bound by duty or honour to act in any particular way. They can travel the length and breadth of the galaxy for whatever reasons they wish. Since their ostensible motivation is profit, they can easily go anywhere or do anything in pursuit of that goal. This makes it very easy for both players and GMs to justify all sorts of actions. On the other hand, the freewheeling nature of interstellar merchants makes it very hard to plan adventures in advance, which places a huge burden on the GM. Free trader characters can come in just about any shape or size or species. Indeed, they are defined by their



unpredictability. In space opera, the classic merchant crew is a collection of random ne'er-do-wells who are united by nothing except their shared desire to make it big. There can be a grizzled former naval officer as the captain, his fur-covered alien first mate, the renegade android engineer, the religiously-motivated doctor, the stowaway kid looking for galactic adventure, the haunted soldier fleeing his past — anything is possible. From a role-playing perspective, a free trader game offers lots of opportunities to create a variety of unusual characters and situations.

At the same time, the wide-open nature of a merchant game is one of its potential drawbacks. As noted above, the GM may find it hard to anticipate where his or her players will go or what they will do, which places an extra burden on adventure designs. Equally troublesome is the lack of a unifying concept. While officers aboard the ISS Crusader are all members of Her Majesty's Imperial Starfleet with a sworn duty to defend the empire against all threats foreign and domestic, the ragtag crew of the merchantman Grendel will not necessarily have the same level of cohesion. Sure, they may all want to get rich but, beyond that, what else have a rogue telepath and a disenfranchised noblewoman have in common? For an interstellar trader game to have staying power, the characters must possess (or develop) a common goal that unites them and helps to propel their adventures forward. This goal could be as simple as putting as much distance between themselves and the decadent Core Worlds as possible or as complex as finding all the components for the legendary Philosopher's Star Stone that can reawaken their homeworld's dying star — and make them rich beyond imagining in the process. Without such a common goal, a trader game may lack staying power and quickly stagnate.

If a merchant game is intended as something more than an excuse for independent characters to wander the galaxy, the GM should give a little thought to the underlying economics of the setting. Too much detail in this area runs counter to space opera's conventions and is a sure way to kill interest in the game. Nevertheless, the GM should have some idea how and why trade exists in the setting. This gives him or her a basis for adventures, as well as fleshes out the setting, which is always a good way to ensure suspension of disbelief. Perhaps the corporations of the Galactic Empire take little interest in low population colony worlds, leaving their needs to independent traders. Perhaps the Mercantile Consortium sells its goods at exorbitant fees, creating a market for smaller merchants (or smugglers) who can provide the same goods at cheaper prices. What is important is that the GM understand the basics of how trade works in the setting, since this understanding is the foundation for so much else in the sub-genre.

OTHER CONCEPTS

The concepts described above are the most prevalent in space opera, but that does not mean they are the only ones. Many other possibilities exist, some of which have equally deep roots in the genre. Here are a couple of other examples:

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COLONISTS

The characters are settlers on a new world, where they must contend with an unforgiving environment, internal dissension, or hostile aliens (or all three!) to keep the colony afloat. This type of game offers numerous drawbacks, since it is limited to a single world rather than allowing the characters to travel freely from one end of the galaxy to the other. At the same time, this sub-genre has a tight focus, which makes it easy to create adventures. Many colonial games will, by necessity, include romantic or soap operatic elements, since the interrelationships of the colonists will be a prime source of drama on isolated worlds.

FISH OUT OF WATER

The characters are displaced persons thrown into a situation they do not truly comprehend. Perhaps they are from a “barbarian world” that is unaware of the vastness of the Galactic Empire that surrounds them. Perhaps they are contemporary humans abducted by aliens and forced to find their way home amid the wonders of the space. This sub-genre can easily be played for laughs, if the GM and players so desire, but it need not be. Anime like *Tenchi Muyo* show how this kind of game might work, with the central character being unaware of the large universe that exists around him.

TIME AND PLACE

A final consideration a GM should make before starting a space opera campaign is when and where it is set. The question of where is perhaps the more straightforward of the two. Will the game be limited to a single world or a small number of them or will it span the entire galaxy? In some respects, space opera should not be limited in its scope, or else it is not space opera. The genre is synonymous with the vastness of space. At the same time, the GM may well have an idea that works best by restricting the players to a handful of locales. It is even possible to have a perfectly legitimate space opera game that is restricted to a single planet, although it would indeed be unusual. For example, almost all of the action in *Mospeada* takes place on Earth and yet it could still legitimately be called space opera. So long as the action of the game relates to a more epic conflict — such as an alien invasion or a galactic civil war — it is possible to limit the scope of the setting for a good reason.

As noted above, however, space opera almost always includes dozens of worlds and lots of travel between them. What good are starships if you do not travel halfway across the galaxy with them? This freedom of movement gives the GM lots of leeway in creating adventures. Need an ice planet? Create one and establish its role in current events. Need a jungle planet next time? No problem. The GM can simply place whatever worlds he or she needs without having to worry how they relate to the others. It is a big galaxy and there are plenty of roles for hundreds of different locales. Some GMs may find such diversity off-putting, since they present innumerable options. In such cases, the GM might want to start small with a particular sub-set of the Mondaine Hegemony rather

than all of its ten thousand worlds. The advantage of space opera as a genre is that there is always room at the top. Once a GM becomes comfortable, he or she can expand the setting to include a greater slice of the galaxy. The sky is not the limit with space opera, unless the GM wishes it to be.

The question of when is a bit less obvious. Most people associate space opera with the future and that is perfectly understandable. With its alien worlds and faster than light travel, it is easy to assume that a space opera game must take place hundreds or thousands of years from now. Very often, it is simpler to say that the game takes place in the year 3000 and be done with it. There are, however, other possibilities that the GM might consider. The first is that the game actually takes place in some time that is “beyond time,” which is to say so far in the future that no one even remembers anymore. Making reference to the setting’s date is literally meaningless, since it may be untold aeons in the future. In such settings, technology is usually so advanced as to be indistinguishable from magic. The other possibility is that the game takes place on an alien world or galaxy. In this case, it could conceivably take place “a long time ago” rather than in the future but, since its far-away galaxy is not our own, it does not conveniently map on to our understanding of history. This technique is useful when a GM wishes to assume different cultural postulates than those on Earth or when he or she wishes to add a mythic or fairytale quality to the game, both of which are very common in space opera.



SPACE OPERA TROPES AND CLICHÉS

Like other anime genres, space opera has its fair share of tropes — story elements that appear on a regular basis. Although many of these might be called clichéd, they reappear often enough that the GM should consider using them in his or her games to give them a proper space opera feel. There are several benefits to doing so. For one, the players may expect them. A space opera game without impossibly large starships and desperate space battles might well be very exciting, but is that what the players want? Sometimes, it is perfectly reasonable to run counter to expectations, since doing so can form the basis of thrilling adventures in their own right? Yet, more often than not, players take great pleasure — even comfort — in seeing classic tropes used and reused. Encountering a huge space battleship or fighting with laser swords are parts of the “vocabulary” of space opera. Ignoring these and other tropes runs the risk of diluting the strengths of the genre and adversely affecting player interest. If you’re going to run a space opera game, run a space opera game, clichéd tropes and all.

This is not to say that the GM should be a slave to space opera conventions, but he or she should be aware of them. The best space opera recognises what people expect and plays with those expectations, sometimes living up to them and other times tweaking them in subtle (or blatant) ways to create new conventions. For example, many space opera stories feature vast galactic empires or federations. Rather than ignore this convention, the GM might decide to make slight changes to it. Perhaps the empire is not a human one but is instead governed by aliens, with humanity being but one insignificant race among the millions that make up the empire’s subjects. Perhaps the federation is not a monolithic entity at all, but a coalition of many societies and cultures, each one jockeying for power and with its own ideas about how best to pursue collective goals. These simple alterations to accepted tropes make them both more interesting and more open to dramatic storytelling. The GM does not need to reject conventions to show the originality of his or her setting. More often than not, originality is best displayed by reworking conventions in new and innovative ways. Conventions do not a story make. The GM should consider them more like building blocks that he or she can accept or reject in building a setting. Conventions may be the material from which space opera is constructed, but it is still the GM who is the architect.

SPACE OPERA CONVENTIONS

Even long-time aficionados of space opera occasionally need to be reminded of the genre’s conventions. That is especially true when constructing a role-playing setting, since, as noted above, it is these conventions that are its building blocks. These conventions also share a lot with “fan service,” since they are sometimes gratuitous elements included in the story simply because the creator believes that is what the fans expect in a space opera. The following is a short list of the most important conventions of the genre for the benefit of both players and GMs. It is far from exhaustive but it should nevertheless provide plenty of inspiration to GMs looking to lend spice to their games.

ANTIQUATED CUSTOMS

Perhaps because of the fairytale quality of a lot of space opera, the genre is replete with old-fashioned customs and traditions. Some are just anachronisms or misapprehensions from a time before scientific speculation was as advanced as today, such as loud explosions in the vacuum of space or brilliant laser fire. Others derive from analogies with other periods of time, such as swashbuckling duels or assassin cults. These customs serve several purposes. The first is that they remind players of earlier times with which they are more familiar (such as Victorian England or the Age of Sail), so as to lessen the future shock of the setting. The second is that they add flavour easily, by taking bits and pieces of real world cultures to lend credibility to the space opera's setting. After all, most people understand the code of chivalry, so why not adopt it for the Emperor's Guard as well?

COOL VILLAINS

Space opera villains are, in the best tradition of all villains, cool. They are not only evil and deadly, but they are also self-assured and impressive. They are the kinds of villains that make doing evil look good. Every now and again, players may want to flirt with the dark side. Space opera villains should tempt them to do so. While henchmen and minions may be incompetent or stupid (or both), the main villain of an adventure or campaign should be neither. He or she should be the epitome of "well-dressed villainy," with lots of style and panache. The villain should be worthy of the characters by presenting them with an opponent that challenges them not only physically but also mentally and morally. Anything less is to fail to live up to space opera's dearest conventions.

INEXPLICABLE NOBILITY

This is perhaps a sub-set of Antiquated Customs, but it occurs so often as to deserve its own mention. Many space opera stories include noblemen and noblewomen among their cast of characters, despite the fact that aristocracy is dying out on Earth. This is true even in settings where there is a democratic Alliance or Republic. Princes and princesses, for example, appear in numerous space opera stories, sometimes in quite unusual places, such as leading a revolt against a tyrannical Empire. There are many reasons why nobility might be found in a setting. Perhaps the lack of interstellar communications led to a rebirth of feudalism. Perhaps some families have grown so wealthy that they can create titles for themselves if they so desire. Whatever the explanation, nobles are very popular characters in the genre and deserve a place in many games.

LOST EARTH

In some space opera settings, the home world of humanity is long forgotten. Perhaps it was destroyed in a nuclear war or hidden away by alien mystics. Perhaps it has been so long since humans left their cradle for space that they no longer remember where they came from. In games where Earth is lost, finding it might be a long-term goal of the campaign, the crowning achievement of archaeologists or explorers. Alternately, Earth's

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present location may be a state secret, since the Empire uses it as a prison planet or a testing ground for new weapons.

MYSTICISM

While religion is not all that common in space opera, mysticism is. The two might seem similar but there are differences. Mysticism is more like a philosophy or worldview than an organised faith. It lacks rituals or priests or any of the other trappings of a genuine religion. Mysticism still provides answers to important questions and guidance about leading a moral life but without a god or prophet for its pronouncement. In some space opera settings, mysticism may be the basis for sects of warriors or assassins and an explanation for their exotic powers.

"PINOCCHIO" ROBOTS

Both literary and anime space opera have always included robots and androids. Both have also included examples of these machines that longed to be human. *Astro Boy* is one important instance of this, but there are many others. These robots try to understand what it means to be human by examining and imitating human beings. Their quest for humanity can be comic or tragic, depending on the style of the space opera. Whichever it is, the robot's story is an occasion to meditate upon what humanity is, both good and bad, and how its condition might be improved.

PSYCHIC POWERS

With a few exceptions, most space opera stories accept the existence of mental powers. They may be rare or difficult to control, but they usually exist. In some settings, they are limited to hyper-intelligent aliens or sects of mystic warriors raised from birth to defend the galaxy. In others, all beings possess the potential for psychic abilities if properly trained. Even so, mental powers need an explanation for their sudden appearance, as well as curbs on their abuse. Perhaps humans now better understand the brain and have the knowledge to unlock its full power. Perhaps this understanding is a gift from alien beings who have been watching humanity for untold millennia. Some settings have laws against the unlawful use of mental powers, while others place limits on how they work. In both cases, this is done to prevent psychic abilities from derailing the plot. Why undertake a criminal investigation when a telepath can simply scan the minds of everyone aboard the space station at the time of the Alliance ambassador's murder?

STEREOTYPICAL ALIENS

Space operas frequently include humanoid aliens in their stories. More often than not, these aliens are little more than "guys in suits" — beings whose outward appearances differ from humanity but whose behaviour is remarkably similar. These aliens frequently have a monoculture, with all members of the species being very much like every other

member. They might all be renowned as bounty hunters or as space engineers. They might all share certain personality traits, such as a devotion to logic or argumentativeness. Such stereotypical aliens fill the role of ethnic characters in many older stories, where members of one cultural group or another was assumed to possess certain tendencies or characteristics universally. While this kind of portrayal can be offensive if done blatantly and without sensitivity, there is no question that is part of space opera's legacy.

TECHNO-BABBLE

Space opera stories take great pleasure in technological solutions to obstacles. The genre has an on-again, off-again love affair with technology in general (see Unreliable Technology, below), so this should come as no surprise. At the same time, space opera usually has little interest in the specific details of how or why technology works. Yet, its fans want to know these things, at least in broad terms. For such occasions, there is techno-babble: jargon that sounds plausible without actually meaning much of anything. Space opera engineers and scientists never say, "I'll go fix the warp drive." Instead, they spout polysyllabic gibberish like, "I need to repair the tachyon resonance modulator" or "I need to recalibrate the E-M induction matrix." These phrases have little to no basis in real science, but they help ground the setting in reality nonetheless by giving the appearance of genuine science. Space opera games should do the same.



UNRELIABLE TECHNOLOGY

The other half of the on-again, off-again love affair between space opera and technology is Unreliable Technology. While the genre lauds technology as the saviour of humanity — and a convenient way to resolve sticky plot points — it also recognises technology as limited. Sometimes it just does not work. Sometimes nothing is better than good old-fashioned human know-how. Indeed, space opera stories regularly trumpet the triumph of the human spirit. Starships break down at critical times, but a talented human engineer can get them up and running again in time to save the crew from the disruptor fire of the Zhimtar Cruiser. Targeting computers are wonderful inventions, but they lack the intuition that is needed to fire an electron torpedo into an exhaust port at just the right moment. In space opera games, Unreliable Technology becomes even more important, since it creates many more opportunities for heroism on the part of the characters. After all, if technology is perfectly reliable, what is there for the characters to do?

WONDER MATERIALS

Part and parcel with Techno-Babble are Wonder Materials. These are fictitious metals, crystals, and other elements that do something cool and unusual — and totally in violation of physics. Need a way to protect a ship from blaster fire? Coat the hull in duralinium, the wonder alloy found only on the Moons of Borea, deep in the Crab Nebula. Need to regulate the flow of matter and anti-matter in your reactor core? Use tetralithium crystals. Wonder Materials go hand in hand with space opera's somewhat spotty record of scientific speculation. In many ways, these materials take the place of magic. They provide a means to allow wondrous devices to work, even if they do not properly explain how this is possible. Since they use the vocabulary and trappings of science, however, most people accept them without much complaint.

HOW TO BUILD A SPACE OPERA

Beyond using a healthy dose of conventions, the GM needs to consider a few other matters when constructing a space opera setting. Here are a few of the most important:

THINK BIG — REALLY BIG

Emphasise the immensity of space, the thrill of star travel, the beauty of the Imperial capital. Under no circumstance skimp when it comes to special effects. In a role-playing game, the GM can have a budget bigger than George Lucas; use it. Space opera anime is known for its hyperbole and over the top action. There is no reason a *BESM* space opera game cannot be known for the same thing. It is rarely a good idea to ignore the details, especially in space opera. The GM should do his or her best to express the grandeur of space and the epic nature of the setting whenever possible, since these are the keys to building a memorable — and fun — setting.

AROUND THE GALAXY IN 90 STANDARD TIME UNITS

This convention is a corollary to the one above, but it deserves its own mention. Space opera does not stand still. It is kinetic — even frenetic. It takes its heroes all over the place in the course of a single story. A good GM should do the same in his or her adventures. The GM does not literally have to take the characters to Andromeda and back, but he or she should try to include a minimum of three very different locales in any space opera adventure. This adds spice and keeps up player interest. The GM should make sure to differentiate each locale and give each its own unique flavour. By doing so, the GM makes the universe seem wider than the confines of a starship cockpit or a planetary battlefield. This convention also opens up the possibility for grander and more heroic exploits — the true test of space opera.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Space opera stories may be about the clash of galactic empires, but, more often than not, that clash is just a backdrop to the stories of the characters who inhabit that setting. Space operas are driven by personal motivations, by the give and take of characters' relationships to one another. Take a look at a lot of anime and it becomes obvious that, in some ways, alien invasions or interstellar wars are just window dressing to very character-driven stories. Viewers may thrill at the sight of an immense starship, but it is the struggle of the characters to achieve their ends that is the heart of the story. *BESM* space opera games should be similarly immersed in character.

MORALITY MATTERS

Space operas almost always have a moral agenda, even if it is as simplistic as “good always triumphs over evil.” *BESM* space opera games should too. This does not mean the GM should ram “values” down players' throats or that the purpose of role-playing is to educate the players in a particular ethical philosophy. Rather, space opera should always be *about* something other than flashy gadgets and bug-eyed aliens. If that is all the GM and players are interested in, their games will quickly become soulless and lacking in many of the qualities that make anime space opera so compelling. If, however, they include the clash of ideas, the conflict of consciences in their games, they will immediately get the stuff of good drama. Some might argue — perhaps with good cause — that classical space opera's choices in these areas are woefully out of date. Even so, its creators recognised that no one can tell a good story unless you have something to say. The same is true of good role-playing.

SAMPLE CAMPAIGN SETTINGS

Now that the basic principles of space opera have been laid out, it is time to take a look at how they might be used to construct a variety of settings. The following are a handful of ideas that draw upon different elements of the genre to create samples for consideration by the GM. They can be used as is or altered to suit the particular wishes of the GM and his or

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her players. The samples presented here are far from exhaustive — space opera is a virtually limitless genre — but they do present a good cross-section of typical settings. If nothing else, these samples can serve as touchstones for GMs looking to create their own settings.

ON HIS MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE

Period: Far Future

Style: Action-Drama

Concept: Secret Agents

It is the 57th century and a vast Galactic Imperium rules humanity. For thousands of years, the Imperium has stood firm, protecting its subjects from threats both internal and external. Unfortunately, nothing lasts forever. The once-mighty Imperium has become decadent and is dying. Where once justice and honour were the currency of Imperial rule, there is now only venality and corruption. Imperial nobles squabble amongst themselves and planetary governors seek new ways to exploit the inhabitants of their sinecures. Emperor Stefaan III is weak and easily manipulated by his courtiers, who ply him with endless diversions, while their cronies loot a thousand worlds of their riches. Meanwhile, the alien Lextrai Hegemony sees the Imperium for what it is — a tempting target — and has begun its plans to conquer its worlds and throw the galaxy into turmoil.

Fortunately for the Imperium, there are still men and women who exemplify its highest ideals. Members of the Imperial Secret Service work behind the scenes to expose the corruption at the heart of the Imperium and stave off its collapse — for as long as they can. These brave secret agents realise that the end may come no matter what they do. Between duplicitous nobles, alien assassins, planetary revolutionaries, and other threats, they have their hands full. Yet, they understand that every success they achieve holds back the night for another day and prevents death and destruction from raining down on the mighty Imperium. Perhaps, if they are lucky, they may hold things together long enough for a bold new emperor to come to the throne and restore the Imperium to its former greatness — or is it treason to consider such a future?

TO THE STARS

Period: Near Future

Style: Action-Drama

Concept: To Go Boldly

With the help of the alien Espezel species, humanity has learned to travel faster than light. Its new star drive allows it to explore and colonise planets hundreds of light years from Earth. Thanks to this invention, the problems of the past, which nearly destroyed the human race, can be left far behind, as a bold new future opens up before them. Together, the two races form the Alliance, a joint government that will govern their worlds, as well as defend them from the threats that exist elsewhere in the galaxy. For every friendly alien species humanity and the Espezel have encountered, there are almost as many hostile ones, some of which see the Alliance as a threat to their military expansion throughout space.

Into this tense situation come the explorers of the Alliance Expeditionary Service (AES). Part explorers, part soldiers, these individuals travel about the galaxy, seeking out new worlds to settle and new species with whom to trade. They also defend the Alliance against the machinations of the psychic Khardena Confederacy and the shapeshifting assassins of the Veldan Empire. Since the Alliance is still in its infancy, AES starships must frequently rely on their own resources. Faster than light communications are slow and it can take weeks for orders to come from Central Command. Starship captains must make decisions in the field without any idea of the full consequences of their actions. Nevertheless, the AES has an excellent record of bringing peace and prosperity to numerous worlds, as well as pushing back the boundaries of scientific knowledge. If it can continue this bold work, the Alliance may survive and prosper in a galaxy far more complicated than humans ever imagined.

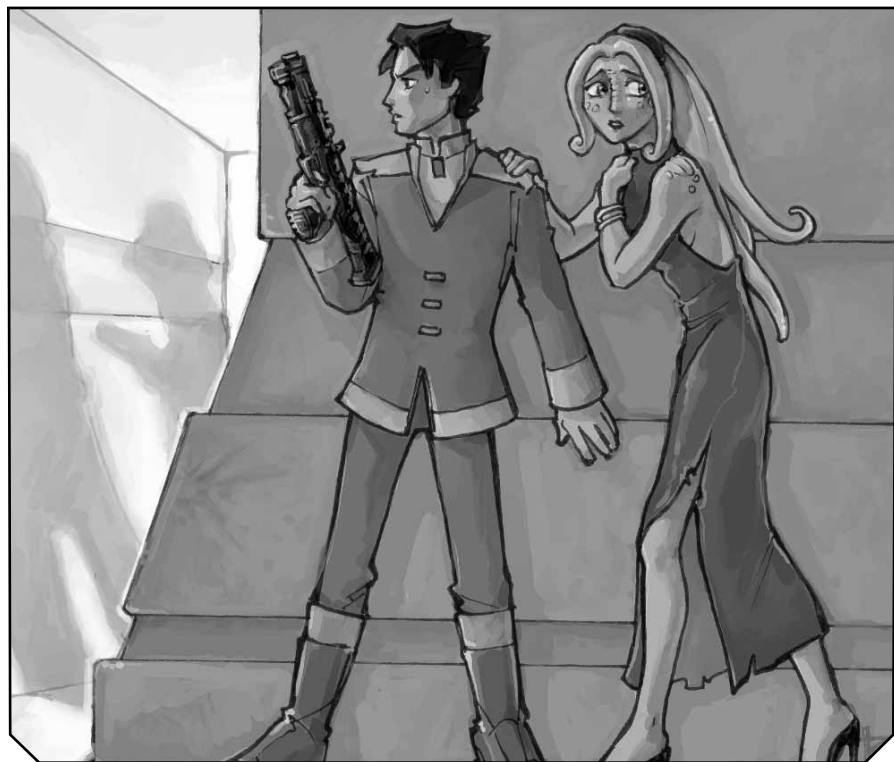
THE SHADOW REBELLION

Period: Another Universe

Style: Action-Romance

Concept: Rebels against the Empire

In the distant past, in another galaxy, the great House of the Rising Sun ruled the vast Stellar Republic with wisdom and strength. Aided by the warrior-monks of the Bindu Order, the House ensured that peace and justice reigned throughout a thousand thousand



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worlds, where myriad races co-existed without rancour or fear. All that came to an end when a young prince of the Rising Sun, Marcus Starkiller, was corrupted by the ancient enemies of the Bindu Order — the Zakoor. Filled with evil and hatred, Marcus overthrew his father and established a tyranny in the Republic, with himself as its undying God-Emperor. Every world of the galaxy must now bow before his might or face the wrath of his Star Legions and planet-destroying weapons.

The only hope for justice lies with the young daughter of Marcus, who has secretly funded a revolution against her father. Gathering together a band of freedom fighters, Zoe Starkiller leads a shadow rebellion against the Zakoor, whose iron grip now squeezes the peace-loving peoples of the Republic. Among her most loyal agents is a young member of the now-outlawed Bindu Order, Lucius Aquaro, who has vowed to give his life to overthrow the God-Emperor and restore peace to the galaxy. Unfortunately, the young monk finds himself torn between his vows to his Order and his growing love for Princess Zoe, whom he sees as the pinnacle of virtue in a universe where such qualities are sadly rare. Against this background, the rebels fight a desperate war against a superior foe. Can they succeed and does Zoe Starkiller have what it takes to overthrow her father, even if he is the most evil man in the galaxy?

THE NEW DARK AGES

Period: Far Future

Style: Action-Drama

Concept: Star Soldiers

In the impossibly far future, the Terran Commonwealth has collapsed and a new dark age has fallen upon the galaxy. Over the hundreds of years that the Commonwealth ruled, science and technology became amazingly advanced. Starships travelled from one end of the galaxy to the other in a matter of hours. Planets were terraformed and nanotechnology created amazing products practically from nothing. Equally impressive were the mecha of the Commonwealth Armed Forces. The queens of the battlefield, whether in space or on land, the mecha ensured the supremacy of the Commonwealth against all foes, whether rebels or corporations.

Eventually, the Commonwealth fell, rent asunder by competing factions under the leadership of charismatic demagogues who now styled themselves “nobles.” The destruction of the Commonwealth ended interstellar trade and brought technological development to a standstill. The scattered worlds of the galaxy could no longer build or repair the mecha they still had. The noble leaders of the Commonwealth’s shards hoarded these wondrous vehicles, entrusting them only to their best and most loyal soldiers. Now, as these successor states prepare for war against one another, the mecha pilots are on the front lines of this conflict. Like knights of old, they carry the banners of their noble lords and seek to bring victory for their factions.

STAR PRECINCT

Period: Near Future

Style: Action-Comedy

Concept: Space Patrol

In 2050, Earth is contacted by representatives of the Galactic Federation, who inform its leaders that the planet has been tentatively approved for admission into the galaxy-spanning alliance. Before the Federal Council can approve its membership, humanity must show a familiarity with the Federation's customs and society. The Federation prides itself on its peaceful and orderly ways, with laws enforced by the Interstellar Rangers. Members of every species contribute members to the Rangers as a way of showing their acceptance of Federation law, as well as part of their duty to other worlds. If humans can prove they are capable of meeting this responsibility, their membership will be approved and Earth will enjoy the benefits that come from membership.

To that end, police officers from the world's major cities (New York, London, Moscow, Tokyo, etc.) are taken to Arcanis III, where they undergo training as Rangers. They must learn the Federation's intricate legal system and contend with the weird alien customs of their hosts — as well as their own rivalries and prejudices. Interpersonal hijinks and misunderstandings lead to a number of adventures across the galaxy. Along the way, the would-be Rangers learn that the Federation is under siege by the Neutron Gang, a group of deadly space pirates, whose leader is inexplicably a human, Green Jimmy Reed. Slowly, the cops realise that the Federation wishes them to deal with the Gang and its leader and their success or failure will determine the fate of the Earth. Are they up to the challenge?

SYNTHEA AND THE PULSARS

Period: Far Future

Style: Action-Comedy

Concept: Idol

In the 29th century, humanity has learned how to create artificially intelligent computers. These A.I.s now perform a variety of functions in the Coalition, including starship pilots, soldiers, and researchers. Recently, an eccentric scientist created a new kind of A.I. — an entertainer. This A.I., who takes the holographic form of an attractive young woman named Synthea, has become a galaxy-wide star. Her songs and performances are in great demand not only among human beings, but the many alien species that also inhabit the Coalition.

With her group of human musicians and back-up singers, Synthea travels the galaxy from planet to planet. Along the way, they run afoul of all sorts of bizarre criminals and rogues, including the alien Deglar, who wish to reprogram Synthea for their own nefarious purposes. Though ill equipped as galactic adventurers, the members of the band somehow manage to foil the plans of these evildoers. Through a combination of dumb luck and skill, Synthea and Pulsars prove they are more than just entertainers — they are the Coalition's greatest heroes as well.

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HS 1,000,003

Period: Far Future

Style: Drama-Comedy-Romance

Concept: School Days

The Confederation has long been a beacon of hope for the many species that make up its membership. Existing peacefully side-by-side, these races, including humanity, work toward common goals and ideals. One of the secrets behind the success of the Confederation is its educational system, where members of all races attend classes together in order to learn about other species. The leaders of the Confederation believe that this system works for the benefit of all, producing generations of beings who are both well educated and broad-minded — the future of the galaxy.

HS 1,000,003 is one of these schools. Located deep within the Janiz asteroid belt, it is home to dozens of different alien beings, who live and study on its sprawling campus. While there, these beings do more than just study; they interact with each other. Whether they are playing zero-G football, attending school dances, or preparing for graduation, this high school is a hive of activity. Everything goes smoothly there, exactly as its principal wishes — until the day Ulysses Quinn arrives. A newcomer from Earth, he has never seen the greater galaxy and knows little of aliens. His parents sent him to HS 1,000,003 to turn him into a model Confederation citizen. Ulysses finds it hard to adapt and knows no one at the school. Only the elastic alien Klemm befriends him, introducing him to the school and its many wonder — including Aria, the beautiful blue-skinned girl from Polakis X. Now, Ulysses does whatever it takes to fit in and win the love of Aria, even if it means throwing HS 1,000,003 into chaos to do it!

GENRE CROSSOVERS

Due to its expansiveness, space opera easily and regularly crosses over with other anime genres. In fact, there are very few “pure” space operas in anime, since most of them borrow extensively from one or more other genres in the course of telling their stories. GMs preparing to run a *BESM* space opera game may wish to follow in this tradition. Here are some ideas and suggestions to consider when mixing other genres with space opera:

ALIEN VISITORS

This genre works very well with space opera, although some of its power is weakened in settings where alien races are commonplace. Even so, it is possible to use Alien Visitors to good effect even in space opera. Perhaps the aliens come from somewhere beyond the Federation and do not understand its customs. Perhaps they become trapped on a barbarian world and must find a way to get back to their home world, but not before their enemies come looking for them, throwing this backwater into chaos. In space opera, Alien Visitor stories often use the Fish Out of Water concept, since it is the simplest way to maintain the integrity of both genres. Alternately, the Alien Visitors can be the conduit by which a Fish Out of Water enters into the wider universe, as is the case in *Tenchi Muyo*.

EXOTIC GIRLFRIEND

With hundreds or thousands of alien races in the Galactic Confederation, finding an exotic girlfriend is pretty easy. This genre works very well with space opera. Frequently, heroes have alien girlfriends and villains might have alien molls they use to seduce the hero to the dark side. The primary consideration is whether galactic society looks askance at such cross-species romance. If it is considered taboo, the pursuit of such love among the stars can lead to all sorts of dramatic — or comedic — possibilities.

GUN BUNNIES

The gun is one element of technology that is always reliable in space opera. Consequently, gun bunnies occur with great frequency in the genre. Sometimes, they are rare and unusual (possibly even the basis for an Exotic Girlfriend), but more often than not they are an accepted part of the setting. Gun bunnies typically work outside the framework of the military or other government agencies, being more likely to be bounty hunters or troubleshooters, however.

HERO TEAMS OR MAGICAL GIRLS

One of the first genuine space opera anime was *Battle of the Planets*. Its focus on a team of complementary heroes is therefore paradigmatic. A team of government special operatives, perhaps with secret technology or powers, works very well in space opera.



Magical Girls, in the strict sense, are rare, but teams of girls given power by aliens or high technology work just as well.

HEROIC FANTASY

Space opera already shares many elements with heroic fantasy. Some settings might freely mix and match between the two genres, perhaps taking place in a time when technology is so advanced as to appear to be magic. Alternately, the game could be set in a galaxy where the laws of physics differ and where magic and science exist side by side. Another option is to use technological trappings to tell a fundamentally fantasy tale, such as the restoration of Prince Jaereth to the throne of the Callaxtian Empire after it had been usurped by his evil uncle, Baron Morgath. The prince and his allies fly starships and use blasters, but they exist in a feudal society where honour is everything and an order of Stellar Knights defends the Empire from invasion. This kind of crossover works very well in space opera and can be seen in many popular anime.

HOT RODS

What could be a better hot rod than a starship? An entire game could be constructed around hotshot pilots who participate in races across the galaxy in a quest to win the greatest race of them all — the Andromeda 5000. Other possibilities include societies where starship racing is a popular pastime of the nobility or where criminals run illegal races for thrill seekers. The existence of many kinds of technologies, such as anti-gravity, broadens the scope for racing considerably in space opera.

IDOLS OR SPORTS

These genres also work well in space opera, with sports being especially easy to integrate for the same reasons as Hot Rods. Perhaps the characters are members of a null gravity hockey team or gladiators in a decadent Galactic Republic. Idols played an important part in *Macross*, so it is not difficult to imagine how they might fit into other space opera settings. With the existence of robots or artificial intelligence, non-human idols might exist as well, giving the genre an interesting twist.

MARTIAL ARTS

Space opera thrives on action, so Martial Arts works well in crossovers. The martial arts used by the heroes might be of alien origin or they might owe their creation to a band of psychic warriors, who use their mind powers to augment their fighting abilities. Alternately, a tyrannical empire might outlaw weapons to anyone but its own shock troops, so hand-to-hand fighting styles may arise among the downtrodden as a way to strike back against them.

MECHA

Mecha is a natural complement to space opera. From its earliest days in anime, the two genres have been closely connected. Mecha are often used as elite vehicles in interstellar militaries. They can also be portrayed as secret weapons developed by one side in a galactic civil war. Since mecha are technological devices, there is little difficulty in finding a way to include them in a space opera setting. Even if they are only used as background colour rather than as the focus of the setting, mecha is a natural crossover with space opera.

PET MONSTER

Where do these fighting creatures come from? Outer space? This crossover provides an origin for pet monsters, as well as a broader context in which to place them. Maybe the masses of the Coalition of Worlds enjoy the spectacle of cute monsters fighting it out in an arena. Maybe they are genetically engineered by the evil Goliath Corporation to keep the populace happy with bread and circuses. Alternately, the monsters may be aliens whose sentence is unrecognised by the people of the Empire — until some brave scientist proves it once and for all.

SCHOOL DAYS

While an unusual crossover, it is not entirely without precedent. The crises and difficulties of high school life can easily be transported into the future. The characters could attend Galaxy High, where aliens from a dozen different worlds learn, side by side. They might all be cadets at the Imperial Naval Academy. In such games, the characters not only learn academic subjects but how to interact with their fellow students, some of whom might not wish to learn the same lessons. Handling a bully is always difficult, but what if he is a two-metre tall reptile from Arcturus. Alternately, military cadets could become embroiled in conspiracies and double-dealing in the corridors of power.

SUPERNATURAL

Space opera is, in many ways, the antithesis of supernatural stories, with their emphasis on the occult and things humanity cannot understand. For that reason, crossovers between the two genres are rare. When they do occur, however, they can come as a shock to the players, since they do not expect their Space Rangers to encounter ghosts or demons in the cold depths of space. On the other hand, there is a strain of space opera that equates earthly monsters with alien beings. In these stories, humanity has now learned how to travel into the “monster’s” turf and to take the battle to them. Space is the abode of horrific demons and explorers must deal with them before they can undertake their missions.

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CHAPTER 3: CREATING CHARACTERS



CREATING SPACE FANTASY CHARACTERS

Although technology and larger than life plots might seem more important in a *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign, characters are the true centre of the genre. Admittedly, this is true in all role-playing games, but it is especially so in space opera. As described in the previous chapter, space opera is very melodramatic. Its plots, while including all manner of advanced technology, exotic locales, and weird alien races, are driven by its characters. They are the heart and soul of space opera, since they anchor its wild storylines in something to which the players can easily relate — interpersonal relationships. Battling against the dictatorial Azure Imperium, for example, is not just a remote duty for Orestes Wildstar — it's personal. The forces of the Imperium killed his entire family and he has therefore made liberating the Central Systems from its grip his life's goal. Likewise, Captain Melissa Fairweather did not join the Interstellar Expeditionary Force simply to chart strange new worlds out of curiosity. It is the fulfilment of a promise she made to her mother as a child. The personal is the universal in space opera. Good players and Game Masters alike see personal interactions as a mine of adventure ideas, which is exactly as it should be.

This chapter discusses the ins and outs of creating a space opera character according to the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* rules. For the most part, the sections that follow include only advice and examples, showing players and Game Masters alike how to use or modify existing rules. The intention here is not to introduce many new rules, since this invariably complicates play and gets in the way of enjoying a campaign. Instead, this chapter is intended as a supplement for the *BESM* rules, not as a replacement. As with all the other chapters in this book, this one aims to give players and GMs ideas on how to use *BESM* to bring your favourite anime space operas to life or to create your own original adventures among the stars.

CHARACTER POINTS

The first thing any GM needs to decide before beginning a new campaign is the power level he or she wants. This is as true in a space opera campaign as in any other genre. Low-powered games are those in which the characters are constructed with 15, 20, or 25 Character Points. Space opera does not obviously lend itself to such point totals. Its emphasis on epic storylines and larger than life personalities makes it hard to create appropriate characters at the low end of *BESM*'s scale. On the other hand, space opera is also a very flexible genre, with lots of possibilities a clever GM may exploit. For example, the characters might all be cadets at the Imperial Naval Academy, young men and women from dozens of different planets, learning the ways of the Empire as they prepare for a life of service in the Emperor's name. In a case like that, the characters would probably be quite inexperienced and built from fewer Character Points than in games where the characters are all 10-year combat veterans who have spent much of their lives fighting in the Great Typhon War.

The average number of Character Points, even in *BESM Space Fantasy*, is 30 or 35. This number works quite well for most campaigns. The characters may lack breadth in their abilities, but that is perfectly fine. Many space opera stories involve characters at the beginning of their careers, as they embark on a great adventure that will one day change the face of the galaxy forever. At this power level, the characters are like those in many anime series — competent but not omnipotent. They have lots of potential for growth, which makes them excellent choices for standard campaigns.

High-powered games include characters in the 40 or 45 Character Points range. This too is not far removed from the conventions of ordinary space opera anime. Characters built on this many points are experienced and extremely competent. They might be Colonial Marines who have spent years on the fringes of human space, fighting alien xenomorphs on many worlds or the crew of the Federation's flagship. While not superhuman, they are very well rounded and capable of achieving great things with only a minimum of effort. This power level works best in campaigns where the challenges are significant and where lesser characters would not merely fail but have no chance of success at all.

At the upper end of space opera campaigns are those high-powered campaigns in which characters are built from 50, 55, or 60 Character Points. While such characters do strain credibility at times, they too are in keeping with space opera's traditions. A game based on *Lensmen*, for example, would certainly be in this point range, since its characters save not one but two universes in the course of their adventures. Such high-powered campaigns would be epic in every sense of the word. The characters would be personally very powerful, on par with gods in some respects, and the challenges they face would be equally impressive. Space opera campaigns of this sort would be very freewheeling. Almost anything could happen, which is why a GM should know what he or she is getting into before consenting. On the other hand, there is no doubt that a high-powered game can be a lot of fun.

CHARACTER OUTLINE

Big Eyes, Small Mouth discusses the basics of a character outline. A character outline is very important in a space opera campaign, because the genre's high technology and epic storylines give players many options to consider. This is a wonderful thing, since more options are almost always better than fewer ones. Unfortunately, it can be a headache for the GM, if he or she doesn't know what to expect beforehand. By working up a character outline, the player is being courteous to the GM. Moreover, a GM who knows how a player envisions his or her character is better able to fit that character into the campaign. If the GM is aware, for example, that one of the characters is actually the daughter of a renowned galactic archaeologist who died mysteriously while exploring the ruined Temple of the Sun on Gladius III, he or she can better work that background into the game. At the same time, if the GM imagines a campaign in which that piece of background has no place, it is easier to alter it in the character outline, before play begins, than deal with an irate player who spent Character Points on Cultural Arts (Archaeology) that serve no purpose in the game.

The four basic questions included in *BESM* — Is the character human? What are the character's strengths? What is the character like? What is the character's name? — all work well in a space opera context. The first one is especially important, since space opera often includes aliens, robots, mutants, and other non-human beings as important characters. The GM may wish to add other questions to the standard list, which relate specifically to the campaign setting, such as "What does the character think about the overthrow of the Republic by the military?" or "Why did the character join the Federal Exploratory Service?" This kinds of questions get the player thinking about how his or her character fits into the setting and gives the GM plenty of information around which to base character-centred adventures, two great boons to any successful *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign. A lengthier treatment of these sorts of questions is found later in this chapter.

TYPES OF SPACE OPERA CHARACTERS

Space opera is a diverse genre, with many different types of settings and characters. Nevertheless, there are certain commonalities that occur again and again. This section briefly discusses some of the most common character types in space opera, in order to give players and GMs an idea of what is possible.

BOUNTY HUNTER

The bounty hunter archetype is a reminder of space opera's origins in Westerns. The idea of a disreputable loner who hunts down criminals for money is a powerful one and makes a great basis for a campaign. Of course, not all settings allow for bounty hunters. Those that do tend to include large lawless frontiers, as well as a remote government unable to pursue criminals on its own.

COLONIST

Another homage to the Western is the colonist, an interstellar homesteader who has left his planet of origin behind to make a life on a new world. Colonists are common in space opera, but mostly as victims of space pirates or weird alien mishaps. As player characters, they should be somewhat more competent and self-reliant, perhaps having unexpected skills that allow them to protect themselves on their own.

DIPLOMAT

For players who prefer intrigue and politics to combat, diplomats make great characters. Being Earth's first ambassador to alien world (or vice versa) holds rich gaming possibilities, whether played straight or as an opportunity for culture shock comedy.

JOURNALISTS

Interstellar reporters travel the galaxy, seeking out a scoop wherever they can find it. This makes them great space opera characters. They can be independent contractors or part of a news agency's staff. Either way, they can become involved in investigations much like a star cop or spy, but without the restrictions that go with either of those professions.

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MERCHANTS

Selling the Moon wholesale has a long and glorious tradition in the genre. Like pirates, merchants often mix heroism with shady business dealings, which makes them an excellent basis for a campaign. They are very mobile and independent, too, which are great qualities in a space opera game. On the other hand, the tedium of commercial transactions can ruin the feel of the setting, which is why the GM is advised to gloss over it in favour of more exciting aspects of the profession.

PIRATE

Space pirates have a long association with space opera. As described in Chapter 2, some are simply nonconformists who live on the edge of society, while others are dastardly blackguards looking out for themselves and no one else. Sympathetic space pirates are usually rebels, driven to a life of crime by their opposition to the Empire's tyranny or the Federation's mistreatment of her native people. They make excellent characters in games where the players wish to mix heroism with the shady side of the galaxy.

PSYCHIC

In many space opera settings, psychic powers are possible. Whether they are accepted or outlawed, playing a character who possesses these powers is always fascinating. A psychic's unique skills would guarantee them employment (legal or illegal) and is a great hook for adventures of a more unusual kind.



SCIENTIST

Space opera loves science and technology, even if it plays very fast and loose with the specifics. Scientists, therefore, make good characters in a campaign. They are rarely the primary protagonists, but they are important sidekicks and allies, especially in games where the characters regularly encounter the unknown and unexplained.

SOLDIER

Soldiers are very common characters in space opera. Typically, they use a variety of impressive weapons and battle armour to achieve their goals. Despite the advance of technology, foot soldiers are rarely outdated in space opera settings. If anything, the genre postulates that the growth of technology makes foot soldiers so versatile and powerful that they become even more essential on the battlefield. It's not especially plausible, but it makes for a great character in a campaign.

SPY

Even in the future, governments and corporations need men and women to keep tabs on their enemies. That's where espionage agents come in. Many space operas are stories of spies or special operatives that work to keep the Galactic Empire or the Solar Alliance safe from their opposite numbers. Due to the genre's emphasis on high technology, there are always plenty of cool gadgets for intelligence agents to use on their missions.

STAR COP

Galactic law enforcers are another staple of space opera. They hunt down criminals and investigate wrongdoing, all in the name of justice and security. Of course, some star cops are corrupt and this can be used to good dramatic purpose, if the GM wishes to run a grittier campaign.

STARSHIP CREW

This is a very broad category that includes lots of different characters, from the captain and first officer to the astrogator, gunner, engineer, and ship's doctor. Starship crews work together either by choice (in the case of independent crews) or because they have all been assigned to the same vessel (in the case of military vessels). Starship crewmembers are usually very specialised in their roles, providing each character an opportunity to shine, which is why they make an excellent basis for a space opera campaign.

TOP GUN

This is a variation on the Starship Crew above. This archetype is a hotshot pilot of a star fighter or mecha, who leads a fast-paced and glorious existence. Many anime focus on the young and good-looking top guns of the setting, since they provide a great way to mix space combat with intrigue and romance.

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STATS

All of *BESM*'s three Stats have a place in a space opera game, although some are more useful than others, depending on one's character concept. Body is obviously the most important for physically oriented characters, such as soldiers. Of course, one of the advantages of high technology is that physical attributes alone are not enough to carry the day. Moreover, technology can reproduce the effects of Body quite easily, which is why many players might consider slighting this Stat in favour of others. Mind is more important in a broad sense. Many Skills use Mind as the relevant Stat and Mind is not as easily reproduced or augmented as Body. In some settings, that may not be true, of course. If artificial intelligence exists or there is significant brain augmentation, Mind too may be boosted or compensated for as well. Soul is important in two different flavours of space opera. In more mystical space fantasies, Soul probably governs psychic powers and Mind Combat. At the other end of the spectrum, gritty dark futures may make use of optional combat rules like Shock to lend realism and danger to the setting. In both cases, Soul becomes a vital Stat. Naturally, no single Stat is more important than another outside the context of the game setting. This is why the Game Master and players should discuss the nature of the setting and campaign before creating characters. This is the best way to avoid a player's wasting Character Points on Stats that have less value than they might appear.

ATTRIBUTES

Unless a space game is very unusual, the Game Master should allow every Normal Attribute in *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*. None of them is especially strange or inappropriate, even in a low-powered or realistic setting. If the GM wishes to limit the selection of Normal Attributes in some way, he or she would be wiser to restrict the number of Levels allowed to characters. Special, Racial, Technological, and Universal Attributes, on the other hand (particularly Paranormal ones), should be weighed carefully before any GM gives permission to use them in a campaign. This section discusses Attributes from the perspective of a space opera GM, pointing out common concerns and problems, as well as suggesting new ways to use the Attributes to represent important elements of the genre. As always, the GM is the final arbiter of what is and is not allowed in his or her campaign. The details given here are intended as guidelines only rather than as the final word.

ORGANISATIONAL TIES

Characters in space opera frequently work for organisations of some sort or another, which is why this Attribute is very common in some types of campaigns. As explained in *BESM*, the value of this Attribute varies depending on the importance the organisation has in a setting. As a rough guide, an organisation that exerts only planetary influence is 1 point/Level, an organisation that exerts interplanetary influence is 2 points/Level, and an organisation that exerts galactic influence is 3 points/Level. For example, the colonial

government of Rintax IV would be a 1 point organisation, the Takamatsu Corporation would be a 2 point organisation, and the Commonwealth Space Navy would be a 3 point organisation.

Obviously, the point value of any organisation needs to be determined in relation to the overall setting. In a space opera campaign confined to a single solar system, for instance, there are no organisations with interplanetary or galactic influence, but that does not mean there are no 2 or 3 point/Level Organisational Ties. In a campaign set within one solar system, the GM must shift the value downward, with Federal Systems government agencies being 3 points/Level, while the Greater Olympus Police Force on Mars might only be a 1 point/Level organisation.

Finally, the GM might consider eliminating this Attribute in campaigns where every character possesses it. If, for example, all the characters are members of the Imperial Dragoons, there may be little point in their all taking Organisational Ties (Imperial Dragoons) at 3 points/Level, provided they are all at the same rank in the Dragoons. If, on the other hand, some characters will be of higher rank than others, the Attribute becomes important and worth including in the game. Another option is simply to give every character a basic rank for free, with any deviation upward or downward costing or netting Character Points.

PERSONAL GEAR

More so than almost any other Attribute, Personal Gear can be problematic. That is because space opera settings include a great deal of technology, some of it quite powerful. As described in *BESM*, Personal Gear divides gear into minor and major items. In general, minor items are considered “civilian” items that are easy to obtain and legal, while major items are restricted in some way or outright illegal. While it is a relatively simple matter in a modern day setting to figure out the category into which an item falls, it isn’t so easy in a space opera setting, which may be very different from the societies of today. For example, would a freedom-loving Federation restrict the personal ownership of blaster pistols? An argument could be made for making a blaster pistol a minor or a major item, depending on what the Game Master means by “freedom-loving.” This same is true of many other pieces of advanced technology.

What this means is that the GM must know his or her setting well before assigning gear to one category or another. In the example above, the GM may decide that the Federation expects all its adult citizens to be armed and ready to fight off any invaders, especially now that the Malvean Hegemony has declared war on it. In that case, most weaponry might be considered a minor or even mundane item. On the other hand, the Malvean Empire is a dictatorial state where ownership of any weapons — even knives — is considered illegal, which makes them major items. Before play begins, the GM must create some general principles by which to judge the proper category of personal gear. This saves time later and helps the players to understand the setting better.

ITEM OF POWER

In a setting where advanced technology is the norm, what constitutes an Item of Power? Put simply — *really* advanced technology. Put more seriously, a space opera Item of Power is something that transcends commonly available technology in some way. This goes beyond purely restricted or illegal technology (which are simply major items of Personal Gear). An Item of Power must be cutting edge or alien in origin. In a world where nanotechnology is a new phenomenon, for example, a portable nanotech medical kit would be an Item of Power. The same would be true for an alien teleportation device, whose principles defy even the greatest minds of the Galactic Republic.

Items of Power may possess Paranormal Attributes. This can be acceptable, even in a space opera setting. The Item's power may be "paranormal" in the sense that Federation science doesn't understand them or can't reproduce them in a laboratory. The aforementioned teleportation device is a good example of this, as would be a psionic headset that allows Mind Control when galactic scientists actively dispute the existence of mental powers. Often, Items of Power are ancient artefacts discovered on some lost world or singular products of an eccentric genius. Realistic space opera campaign probably will not include them or will do so sparingly.

In all instances, however, Items of Power must still fit within the framework of the campaign. If nanotechnology simply is not present in a campaign, possessing a nanotech medical kit is not possible. Just because a player can make it with the *BESM* game mechanics does not mean the GM must allow it in the game.

"MAGIC"

In most space opera settings, magic in the strict sense is impossible. Space opera is science fiction, after all, even if it does play fast and loose with scientific principles. Even so, the idea of truly supernatural powers and abilities is anathema to the genre and should be disallowed. The Magic Attribute, as described in *BESM* is another matter entirely, since it can also be used to represent psionic abilities as well. The same applies to Dynamic Sorcery, which can also be used to represent open-ended mental powers. In most space opera settings, psionics are often weak, assuming they exist at all — limiting the characters to no more than Level 2 or 3 in Magic would be quite reasonable. Another approach is to restrict the use of Magic in various ways, such as requiring characters to assign a Magic Option such as Focus or Ritual. If the GM allows higher levels, psionics may well become a focus of the campaign.

Of course, space opera is not devoted to "hard science." It includes lots of fantastical settings, including some where higher levels of Magic might be appropriate. Perhaps the ancient Bindu Order trains its warrior-monks to harness their inner strength to such an extent that they can literally move starships with their minds or cast lightning bolts from their hands. Perhaps the setting is so far in the future that history has come full circle and genuine magic has returned, with wizards and necromancers wandering the corridors of

the Imperial Capital along with scientists and courtiers. Another possibility might be that nanotechnology has become so advanced as to create free-roaming nanites that a character can control with a thought, reshaping them as needed. This would appear to be magic, but it is actually highly advanced technology of a very flexible sort.

Despite its name, Magic can be a very useful Attribute in a space opera campaign. Many powerful and flexible abilities, whatever their origin, can be represented through Magic (or Dynamic Sorcery). The GM should not let its “Paranormal” type distract him or her from this fact. Magic can be used to represent very advanced technology just as well as occult powers. At the same time, Magic can be so powerful that, even in settings where the GM can explain it as something other than supernatural in nature, he or she might well decide to restrict its use by characters.

OWN A BIG MECHA (OBM)

This Special Attribute is a very important one, even in settings where there are no “mecha,” as such. That’s because OBM can be used to describe any type of vehicle, not merely giant transforming robots or other staples of anime. Everything from a motorcycle to a huge interstellar battleship can be described through OBM and the GM should be familiar with the mecha rules from *BESM* before allowing a character to take this Attribute. For that matter, the GM should learn to use these rules, if he or she intends to include vehicles and vehicular combat in his or her game.

It should be noted that OBM can also be used to represent a powerful armoured battlesuit as well as a vehicle. In many space opera anime, such battlesuits are commonplace and are the hallmark of star soldiers. If the GM is running a game of this sort, he or she should also learn how to use these rules.

In some campaigns, the GM may wish to forego the use of this Attribute. For example, if all the characters are crewmembers aboard the *ISS Indomitable*, an imperial destroyer, there is little reason to force each character to take OBM, even with all sorts of Mecha Defects like Conditional Ownership to lower the cost. The *Indomitable* is a prop for the campaign, whose adventures cannot take place without its presence. Therefore, it is foolish to make the players waste Character Points on it. On the other hand, if the characters are a diverse group of characters, with one playing a smuggler and another playing a powerful warrior-monk of the Bindu Order, allowing the smuggler to purchase Levels in OBM for a custom starship helps ensure balance in the game. The warrior-monk may be more powerful on an individual level, but the smuggler is truly exceptional when the campaign shifts to space. Likewise, if the characters are all crewmembers aboard the smuggling vessel *Second Chance*, their players could pool their Character Points to create a more impressive vessel than any one of them could buy alone. This is a perfectly valid way to use Own a Big Mecha and the GM is encouraged to adapt the Attribute to the realities of his or her campaign setting.

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CHAPTER 3: CREATING CHARACTERS

SERVANT

For the purposes of space opera, Servant also includes robots, androids, large alien allies, and pets of various sorts. Just as described in *BESM*, this Attribute gives the character a servant that is the equivalent of a mediocre character. If the player wishes to have a more impressive robot servant (such as a warbot, for example), he or she would be advised to use Own a Big Mecha instead.

DEFECTS

Space opera characters are defined as much by their flaws as by their strengths. This is a reflection of the source material, as well as a concession to the needs of drama. Despite all the technological wonders of the far future, they still rely upon frail, flawed beings to employ them. All of the Normal Defects included in *BESM* work well in most space opera settings. Many of the Special Defects require some consideration beforehand, especially those that relate to supernatural matters (such as Magical Restriction).

AGEISM

In some futuristic societies, the definition of a young person may change considerably. There are many facts to take into account, most especially how long members of a given species live. If, in the Two Suns Confederation, human beings use advanced medical technology to live an average of 150 years, adolescence might be considered to last until age 30, with most people over that age failing to take such “youngsters” seriously. On the other hand, an alien race might have a very short lifespan. In a case like that, they may treat individuals who are only 10 years old as full adults, in which case Ageism applies only to those below the age of 5.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENT

Special Requirement is a broad category that can include many different types of defects in a space opera campaign. Many alien races would certainly have a Special Requirement, particularly if they come from an exotic environment very different from that of the Earth. For example, the militant Axonites might breathe liquid nitrogen rather than oxygen, which accounts for their frigid skin temperature. On the other hand, a cyborg might not heal naturally and would require mechanical repairs to heal any damage, which would be another type of Special Requirement.

Besides racial or technological requirements, there may also be other types of physical and mental requirements. A character who is addicted to Azhlani dust spice, for example, qualifies for a Special Requirement, especially if he suffers withdrawal pains if he doesn't get his daily hit of the drug. The same might apply to a virtual reality addict who cannot get through the day without putting on his sim-suit and immersing himself in a fantasy world. Members of obscure religious sects might have psychological requirements, such as

the way the Thorgald warriors must say a ritual invocation to the Overmind before they enter into battle. Other such cultural quirks could be included under this Defect, like the paranoid Ragava's need to carry a dagger with them wherever they go or a Telgad warrior's need to wear his full battle dress at every occasion — even in bed!

SKILLS

Skills are very important in a space opera campaign, if only because so many obstacles are more easily overcome through the application of complex technical know-how. Piloting a starship, firing a blaster, or operating a computer all require at least a passing familiarity with Skills of one sort or another. This section briefly discusses a few of the most significant issues relating to the use of Skills in a space opera setting.

TWEAKING SKILL COSTS

“Space Opera” is a basic category for Skill costs in *BESM*. The list of Skills provides suggested point costs appropriate to the genre. A Game Master may decide, however, that those Skill costs don't suit his or her particular campaign. For example, the chart assumes (not unreasonably) that Gun Combat will play an important role in the setting, which is why it is valued at 5 points/Level. Piloting is likewise as highly valued. In a game in which the characters are all scientists assigned to a remote space station to study an anomalous black hole, neither Gun Combat nor Piloting would be particularly important. The GM might decide to tweak the Skill costs to reflect the Skills that are more important in the campaign, such as Physical Sciences.

The general principle behind the Skill costs in *BESM* is that the most useful Skills cost more Points per Level, while those that are just “background” skills cost fewer Points. Keeping this in mind, the GM should have little trouble deciding which Skills to increase or decrease in cost from those given in the chart.

SPECIALISATIONS

Another area the GM should consider altering, if only slightly, are Skill Specialisations. Each Skill listed in *BESM* includes a handful of example Specialisations. Since these examples are not exhaustive, the GM in a space opera campaign may require additional ones. As usual, the exact Specialisations will vary from campaign to campaign, but here are a handful of Skills to which GM should consider adding new Specialisations. By adding customised Specialisations to your Skill lists, you ensure that your *BESM* game most accurately reflects your campaign.

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

If there are a relatively small number of planets in the setting, the GM may decide that a character needs a Specialisation for the biology of each of them. For example, Zemlan biology as opposed Khavian biology.

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CHAPTER 3: CREATING CHARACTERS

COOKING

The GM might decide to allow Specialisations in Cooking, based on the foods of particular planets or alien races.

DRIVING OR PILOTING

If there are enough unusual vehicles, the GM may decide to include additional Specialisations to cover them. Remember, Driving/Piloting Specialisations cover vehicle categories, not specific vehicles (for example, Light Space Fighter rather than K-Wing K32 Fighter). Battlesuits, if they are large enough, might require use of the Driving Skill and therefore their own Specialisation as well.

LINGUISTICS

Obviously, alien races require their own Specialisations, as might spoken computer languages.

MECHANICS

If nanotechnology exists, it would require its own Specialisation of this Skill.

MEDICAL

There are a number of new Specialisations possible in this category, especially if there are alien races whose medicine differs greatly from the human norm. Other conceivable Specialisations include Nano-surgery and Neuro-surgery.

SPORTS

Some space opera settings assume that there are new types of sports in the future, like zero-G hockey or exotic animal racing. There should be new Specialisations for these sports.

TRACKING

Some worlds have their own unique terrain features (like the Fungi Forests of Daarmoeth II) that require their own Specialisations in this Skill.

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL

Like Tracking, some worlds have terrain that is unique enough to demand their own Specialisations.

SPECIES TEMPLATES

BESM introduces the concept of a “species template,” which consists of a series of Stats, Attributes, and Skills associated with members of a particular species. All members of that species conform to that template, although many, if not most, will be significantly better than its provisions. A template also has a Character Point Cost associated with it. If a player chooses to take a template, he or she must pay the point cost from his or her pool of Character Points to do so. Any Points the player has left can be used to customise the template by adding further Stats, Attributes, or Skills. A template does work on the assumption that all members of the same race share certain basic characteristics, but such stereotyping is part and parcel of the space opera genre. No one should be offended by it, so long as it is handled sensibly.

In starting a campaign, the GM should design the templates for any commonly encountered aliens or other unusual creatures (such as cyborgs, for example). These templates are useful not just to the players, but also to the GM, who may use them to aid in the creation of NPCs. There is no such thing as a “typical” Point Cost for a template. The Point Cost for templates intended for use by player characters should be keyed to the power level of the campaign. If characters are built from 35 Points, a 20 Point template will be quite expensive, perhaps prohibitively so. In a 60-point campaign, however, such a template would be more than acceptable. In general, it is best to keep player character templates down to a Point Cost of no more than half the base starting Character Points. Again, this is a guideline rather than a rule. Each GM must decide for his or her own campaign what is best.

To create a template, a GM should determine what is typical (or stereotypical) of each race. Is the race known to be very intelligent? If so, assigning a bonus to the race’s Mind Stat and/or a bonus to the Highly Skilled Attribute would be appropriate. Is the race known for its ability in combat? For such a war-like race, a bonus in Combat Mastery would be in order. Do all members of the race have fangs? Thick, armoured hides? Excellent night vision? For each aspect that is applied to virtually every member of the race, a template modifier should be applied. The final point cost of the template is the total Point cost of all the modifiers, ideally balanced to a multiple of 5.

To give GMs and players some idea of how a template can be constructed, the following sections present a small number of examples. They can be used as they are or modified, if so desired. Otherwise, they are intended simply as examples of species templates for use in *BESM Space Fantasy*.

ALIENS

Aliens are a staple of space opera anime. Here are three templates of standard aliens for use in any space opera campaign.

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TELGAD

The Telgad are a proud warrior race, who pride themselves on their skill at arms. Though disdained by others as loud-mouthed oafs, they have nonetheless carved an empire for themselves among the stars. Telgad are commonly encountered as soldiers or mercenaries, occupations at which they excel.

TELGAD TEMPLATE

Template Cost: Zero Character Points

Body +1, Mind -1

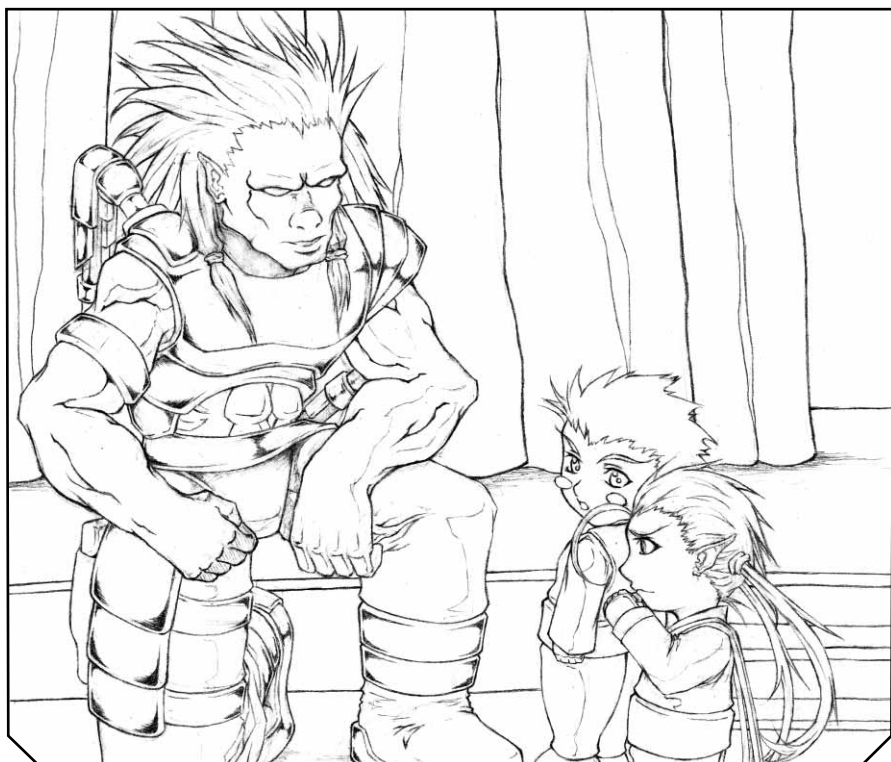
Damn Healthy! +1, Highly Skilled +1

Melee Attack +1, Melee Defence +1

Not So Fast +1, Special Requirement +1 (Must wear battle dress at all times)

GAUFREY

The Gaufrey are short, playful aliens, who travel the galaxy seeking out new diversions. Their own homeworld was lost aeons ago and they are now the interstellar equivalent of gypsies — part entertainers, part thieves, with a reputation to match. Even so, the Gaufrey can be found almost anywhere and are an important part of galactic society.



GAUFREY TEMPLATE

Template Cost: 5 Character Points

Soul +2

Divine Relationship +3, Highly Skilled +2

Acrobatics +1, Ranged Defence +1, Sleight of Hand +1, Stealth +1, Unarmed Defence +2

Not So Strong +2

ESPEZEL

The Espezel are a long-lived and peaceful race renowned for their psychic abilities and remarkable learning. They deal fairly, if arrogantly, with “lesser species,” whom they nevertheless aid when faced with a genuine threat. The Espezel typically become scientists or diplomats, as they have little love for warfare and prefer to avoid it if at all possible.

ESPEZEL TEMPLATE

Template Cost: 15 Character Points

Body +1, Mind +1, Soul +2

Aura of Command +2, Dynamic Sorcery (Psionics) +1, Energy Bonus +1, Feature (Longevity) Level 1, Heightened Awareness +1, Highly Skilled +1, Mind Shield +2

Biological Sciences +1, Cultural Arts +1, Linguistics +2, Physical Sciences +1, Social Sciences +1

Not So Tough +1

OCCUPATIONAL TEMPLATES

As with racial templates, GMs can create occupational templates which reflect the basic knowledge and training that one usually possesses when undertaking a given career within the campaign setting. Again, by developing these templates, GMs can speed up character creation and provide additional individuality for their campaign. Giving the Space Marine occupational template the Melee Weapons (Vibro-Blade) Skill rather than the Gun Combat Skill provides description to the type of space marine's one is likely to encounter in the universe. Further, when combined with the racial templates, a GM can quickly and easily create NPCs on the fly during a game. By simply beginning with a Body, Mind, and Soul of 4 and adding both the racial and occupational template, a GM can throw together a generic NPC in less than a minute. This prevents any delays when the characters suddenly divert from the planned adventure and run into a Tytherian Bounty Hunter for whom the GM doesn't have stats made up yet - Simply use the Tytherian racial template and the Bounty Hunter template and you have the character, ready to go.

Following are some sample occupational templates. Again, these are simply presented as examples — GMs should create customised templates that fit within their campaign.

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BOUNTY HUNTER

Template Cost: 10 Character Points

Gun Bunny (Dead Eye, Portable Armoury) +2, Heightened Awareness +1, Highly Skilled +3, Kensei (Judge Opponent) +1, Massive Damage +2

Burglary +1, Electronics (Security) +1, Intimidation +1, Navigation +1, Poisons +1, Stealth +1, Urban Tracking +2, Gun Combat +1, 2 unused Skill Points

Nemesis +1

MECHANIC

Template Cost: 5 Character Points

Highly Skilled +2, Personal Gear +2, Mechanical Genius +1

Computers +1, Electronics +2, Mechanics +2

MYSTIC

Template Cost: 20 Character Points

Focused Damage (energy sword) +1, Highly Skilled +3, Jumping +1, Kensei (Blind Fighting, Judge Opponent, Lightning Draw) +3, Mind Control +1, Mind Shield +1, Personal Gear +1, Precognition +1, Sixth Sense (detect mystic energy) +1, Telekinesis +1, Telepathy +1

Acrobatics +1, Controlled Breathing +2, Cultural Arts (Occultism) +2, Medical +1, Stealth +1, Melee Attack +1, Melee Defence +1, Ranged Defence +1

Attack Restriction +2

NOBLE

Template Cost: 15 Character Points

Aura of Command +2, Flunkies +2, Highly Skilled +2, Organisational Ties +3

Cultural Arts +2, Intimidation +2, Linguistics +3, Performing Arts (Public Speaking) +2, 4 unused Skill Points

OFFICER

Template Cost: 10 Character Points

Aura of Command +2, Highly Skilled +2, Organisational Ties +2, Personal Gear +2

Computers +1, Intimidation +1, Military Sciences +2, Gun Combat +1, 2 unused Skill Points

Owned by a Megacorp +1, Red Tape +1

OUTLAW

Template Cost: 15 Character Points

Heightened Awareness +1, Highly Skilled +3, Own a Big Mecha +3, Personal Gear +1

Burglary +1, Gaming +1, Mechanics +1, Navigation +1, Piloting +1, Sleight of Hand +1, Urban Tracking +1, Gun Combat +1, Unarmed Attack +1

Easily Distracted (money) +1, Skeleton in the Closet +1

SCIENTIST

Template Cost: 5 Character Points

Organisational Ties +1, Highly Skilled +3, Personal Gear +4

Biological Sciences +2, Computers +1, Electronics +1, Medical +2, Physical Sciences +2, Social Sciences +1

SPACE MARINE

Template Cost: 15 Character Points

Combat Mastery +1, Damn Healthy! +1, Gun Bunny (Weapons Encyclopaedia) +1, Highly Skilled +3, Massive Damage +1, Organisational Ties +1, Personal Gear +2

Demolitions +1, Driving +1, Intimidation +1, Military Sciences +1, Wilderness Survival +1, Gun Combat +1, Heavy Weapons +1, Melee Attack +1, Thrown Weapons +1

Owned by a Megacorps +1

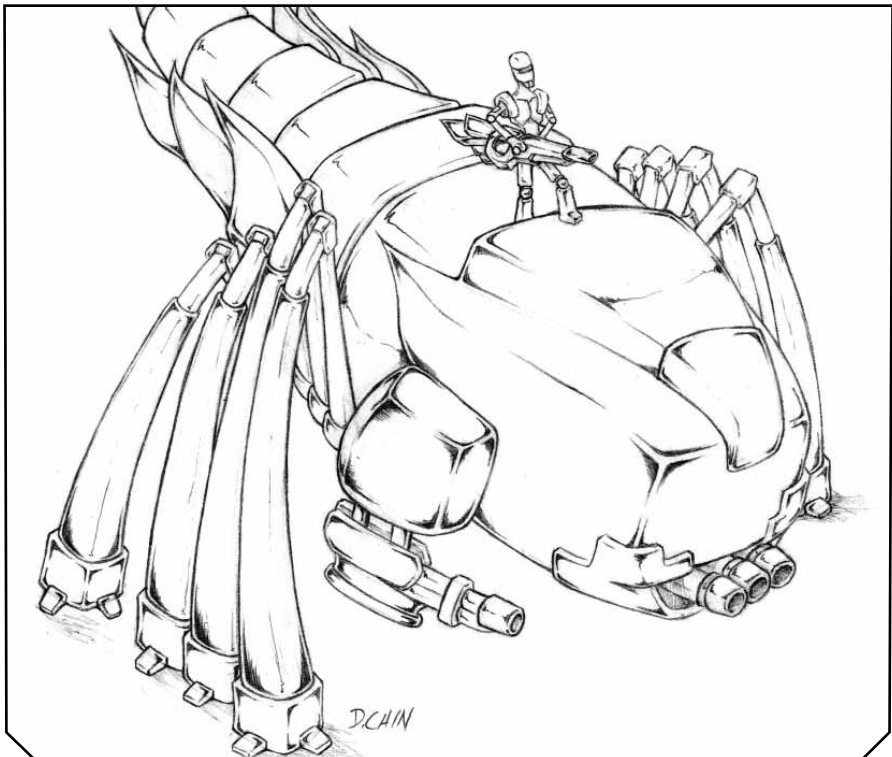
SPACE PILOT

Template Cost: 15 Character Points

Highly Skilled +1, Organisational Ties +1, Own a Big Mecha +3

Navigation +1, Piloting +2, Heavy Weapons +1, Ranged Defence +2, 2 unused Skill Points

Conditional Ownership +2, Owned by a Megacorps +1



SPACE TRUCKER

Template Cost: 5 Character Points

Highly Skilled +2, Own a Big Mecha +2, Personal Gear +1

Business Management +2, Forgery +1, Gaming +1, Mechanics +1, Navigation +1, Piloting +1

Skeleton in the Closet +1

SWASHBUCKLER

Template Cost: 15 Character Points

Appearance +1, Damn Healthy! +1, Divine Relationship +3, Gun Bunny (Dead Eye, Steady Hand) +2, Heightened Awareness +1, Highly Skilled +4, Kensei (Chanbara Master, Precise Stroke) +2, Jumping +1, Personal Gear +1

Acrobatics +2, Driving +1, Intimidation +1, Pilot +1, Riding +1, Seduction +1, Sports +1, Swimming +1, Gun Combat +1, Melee Attack +1, Melee Defence +1, Ranged Defence +1

Girl/Guy Magnet +1, Nemesis +1

VAGABOND

Template Cost: 10 Character Points

Art of Distraction +3, Divine Relationship +3, Heightened Awareness +1, Highly Skilled +3, Item of Power +1, Personal Gear +1

Burglary +1, Cultural Arts +3, Disguise +1, Forgery +2, Gaming +1, Linguistics +3, Performing Arts +1, Sleight of Hand +1, Stealth +1, Unarmed Defence +1

Easily Distracted (mysteries) +1, Nemesis +1, Wanted +1

CYBORGS

Cyborgs are “cybernetic organisms,” which is to say a biological entity to which cybernetic modifications have been made. Here is a pair of cyborgs suitable for use as characters in a space opera game.

GENERAL PURPOSE CYBORG

This cyborg is little more than a mechanical shell for a biological brain. Since the shell is designed to reproduce a human body almost perfectly, it is little better than its biological counterpart. Even so, there are some advantages to having a mechanical body, which is why the general purpose cyborg remains in use throughout the galaxy.

GENERAL PURPOSE CYBORG TEMPLATE

Template Cost: 5 Character Points

Accessories +1 (implanted comlink), Life Support +1, Light Armour +1, Special Defence +1 (ageing), Special Defence +2 (disease)

Special Requirement +1 (healing requires repairs)

BATTLE BORG

The battle borg is similar in many respects to the General Purpose Cyborg, except that it is better designed to engage in combat. Most battle borgs serve as members of special operations units, participating in commando raid and other such activities. It is very well suited for these missions, which is why it remains widely used.

BATTLE BORG TEMPLATE

Template Cost: 10 Character Points

Accessories +2 (implanted comlink, night vision), Damn Healthy! +1, Heightened Awareness +1, Light Armour +2, Special Defence +1 (ageing), Special Defence +2 (disease), Speed +1, Super-Strength +2

Special Restriction +1 (healing requires repairs)

BACKGROUND

BESM gives the Game Master the option of awarding a small number (1-3) of Background Points to players who create details about their character for his or her use in the campaign. *BESM Space Fantasy* highly recommends this option, since character background is very important to the genre. The more information that the GM has about a character, the easier it is to weave that information into the campaign, in order to create a rich and satisfying series of adventures that engages the player on a variety of levels.

To aid players in coming up with these background details, there are a series of questions on the next page that players can answer to help focus their minds on integrating their character into the setting. This is not an exhaustive list and players are not expected to answer all of the questions. Rather, they are intended as possible questions players might consider. The GM might wish to add others, depending on the nature of his or her campaign and the kinds of details he or she needs to create a properly character-centred campaign. For example, in a game in which the characters are all members of a rebel movement against a dictatorial empire, the GM might include the question, "Why did you join the rebels?" Alternately, in a game in which the characters are all interstellar merchants, the GM might ask, "Do you ever cheat your customers?" The answers to these questions enrich a game in numerous ways, which is why the small reward of 1-3 Character Points is more than reasonable.

Obviously, the list is very generic in nature. Even so, if a player answers even half of these questions, he or she will have provided the GM with plenty of details for the campaign. After all, the GM is asking the players to become co-creators of the game with him or her. That is certainly worth the price.

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• BACKGROUND QUESTIONS •

- 1 What does your character look like?
- What is your character's occupation?
- Where does your character live?
- 2 When was your character born?
- How old is your character?
- Where was your character born?
- 3 Where did your character grow up?
- Did your character have any significant friends or enemies as a youth?
- What were your character's hobbies?
- 4 What was your character's home like?
- Who are your character's family members?
- What was your character's schooling like?
- 5 Why did your character choose to his or her current occupation?
- Did your character have any previous occupation?
- Did your character experience any traumas in earlier life?
- 6 What does your character do to relax?
- Who are your character's best friend and worst enemy?
- Does your character have a spouse or significant other?
- Does your character have any children?
- Does your character operate according to a code of honour?
- What are your character's fears?
- Does your character have any vices?
- What are your character's ultimate goals in life?

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

In standard *BESM*, the Game Master awards the players one bonus Character Point every five sessions and one bonus Skill Point every other session. This rate of advancement enables the characters to improve themselves at a slow but steady pace, particularly when it comes to things like Stats and Attributes. Skills improve somewhat more quickly, but the rate of advancement is still not very quick. For various reasons, the standard approach may not be appropriate for a space opera game, which is why the Game Master should consider modifying it to suit the needs of his or her campaign.

GENRE AND SETTING CONSIDERATIONS

There are two primary things a GM should take into account before altering the rate of character advancement in his or her game: the genre and the setting. By its nature, space opera is fast-paced, cinematic, and epic in scope. Some GMs might choose to interpret these characteristics in a way that leads to a greater rate of advancement than is usual. After all, how can a character go from a lowly farm boy to the hero of the rebellion in the course of a campaign if he is only gaining one Character Point every five sessions of play? Space opera often includes characters that grow immensely in power over a relatively short period of time. This is especially true in games that focus on galactic-scale events, where only truly mighty men and women can affect the course of history.

Of course, genre considerations must always be balanced against setting considerations. While it may be true that most space opera includes rapid advancement and growth in personal power, this is not the same as saying that *your* campaign must include it. If a GM has constructed a campaign that is more amenable to smaller scale stories and slow character advancement, there is nothing wrong with that. Not all space opera is cut from the same cloth. Just watch *Macross* and compare it something like *Wings of Honneamise*. Both fit within the genre, but they each have their characteristics and pace — and so should *BESM Space Fantasy* games.

SETTING THE PACE

If the GM wishes to change the pace of character advancement, he or she should do so in accordance with the campaign's requirements. That is, if the campaign is about a band of nobodies from a backwater planet who join the Imperial Legions to see the galaxy and quickly become enmeshed in high level politics and intrigue, it might be better to increase the rate of advancement to one bonus Character Point every three sessions and one bonus Skill Point every session. If the GM is more ambitious, the rate could be increased even further. So long as the GM and players are comfortable with it, it is completely acceptable to alter the rate upward (or downward) to suit the campaign focus.

FURTHER OPTIONS

Another consideration is that characters advance through means other than bonus Character and Skill Points. If the characters make new friends and allies through their actions, for example, they have advanced. Likewise, if they manage to take their starship to the shipyards of Quantrell VI and obtain a faster jump drive, they have also advanced themselves. Advancement is measured in the achievement of goals and gaining influence within the setting. So long as the characters continue to grow, they are advancing. A successful space opera campaign is one where winning the eternal friendship of Duke Halvor of Terra is as important as gaining another Level of Gun Bunny with Character Points.

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CHAPTER 4: TECHNOLOGY



Space opera revels in technology. It is the “magic” of the genre, the setting element that allows stalwart heroes and dastardly villains alike to travel the stars, fight immense space battles, and communicate with their allies over interstellar distances. With the trappings of technology, space opera is more fantasy than science fiction. Depending on the plausibility of the technology involved, it might still be more fantastical than plausible. In either case, the Game Master should give some thought to the role and use of technology in his or her campaign, as well as the specific instances of it that are allowed. The decisions he or she makes will determine a great deal about the look and feel of a space opera campaign, including the types of adventures that can be created for it.

This chapter gives a brief overview of the important questions the GM should consider, along with advice and examples to guide him or her in answering them. Unlike Chapter 3, this chapter contains no rules, since it would be impossible to cover every possible permutation of space opera technology. Consequently, it approaches the topic with broader strokes, referring the GM to *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* for most rules-related matters, so that the following sections emphasise technology as a setting and plot elements rather than as mere hardware. This approach is truer to the space opera anime from which this book draws its inspiration and is therefore of much greater use to GMs looking to create *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* campaigns in a similar style.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Like any other setting element, the Game Master should think about the role of technology in his space opera campaign. What purpose does it serve? What does it need to do? While these may seem like foolish questions, they are not. In our own time, we are accustomed to ignore the technology that surrounds us. We rarely give much thought to using a computer or a cell phone, let alone driving a car. These technologies are so commonplace that we barely even register their existence, let alone think about them in a critical way. They form part of the “background noise” of early 21st century life and are therefore easily overlooked.

In a *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign, though, the GM cannot afford to be as blasé. He or she should at least consider the role of technology in the setting: How do people view it? How does it affect society? Even if the GM postulates a world in which blaster pistols and star drives are everyday things, the GM should come to that decision after some thought. In some campaign settings, it is perfectly legitimate to reduce technology to nothing more than background noise, just as it is in our world. This approach works perfectly fine in campaigns where technology is little more than a tool, the means by which the characters achieve their goals. For example, a campaign in which the characters are all members of the Galactic Rangers and fight interstellar criminals will probably focus more on investigations and interpersonal relationships than on gadgetry. The same might be true of a campaign in which the characters are Spacefleet officers charting new worlds and new civilisations for the Planetary Federation, since the emphasis would be on the thrill of exploration rather

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than the role of technology. In these case, technology is “chrome,” which is to say pretty to look at but ultimately unimportant.

On the other hand, many campaigns (including variations of those described in the previous paragraph) might adopt a different approach. Technology might appear front and centre in such settings. Suppose, for example, the campaign focused on an interstellar empire in which androids are used as slave labour. In this setting, the role — and morality — of technology is one of its central elements and the basis for many adventure plots. Likewise, a campaign in which the characters are colonists on a hostile world, kept alive thanks to force fields that hold planetary storms at bay, would certainly make technology an important element of the game. Space opera, after all, is often about moral or ethical quandaries and advanced technologies. Whether they be artificial intelligence, life extension, or genetic engineering, technology offers plenty of opportunities to tell morality tales. Technology can also give the GM the opportunity to highlight how a futuristic world differs from our own, such as a society in which cloning is the preferred form of reproduction and nuclear families are a thing of the past.

There is no right or wrong way to use technology. Space opera anime include many different approaches, all of which are equally valid and allow the GM to tell a wide variety of science fiction stories. In the end, what is important is that technology not be glossed over. Instead, its role should be carefully considered and a decision made based on the kind of setting the GM wishes to create, as well as the types of stories he or she wishes to tell. Space opera is diverse enough to include plenty of options, whatever the decision the GM makes.

SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

The science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke once famously said, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic,” which is now sometimes called “Clarke’s Law.” Clarke’s Law is doubly true in a space opera setting, where technology is usually far beyond the imagination, let alone capabilities, of today’s scientists. Nearly every significant space opera technology, from laser pistols to faster than light travel, is impossible according to the principles of contemporary physics. This is not simply a case of our own science being unable to produce these technologies because of some failing on our parts. Rather, space opera technology defies the laws of physics. Even with unlimited resources and time, no 21st century scientist could build a working faster-than-light drive — not unless physics as we currently understand it is wrong.

Space opera sometimes takes the approach that modern physics *is* wrong, or at least incomplete. Regularly, some rare genius on par with Einstein or Hawking comes along who finally manages to overcome some long-standing problem in physics, paving the way for the development of some new and exciting technology that changes the universe forever. Indeed, visionary scientists like these are common characters in anime. Of course, not all space opera settings take this approach. Some, especially those set in the very far future,

do not worry much about explaining the existence of physics-defying technology. This is a perfectly valid approach. After all, most anime fans know what a blaster pistol is and accept its existence. They do not need to know how it works or who developed them before they can enjoy a story in which it appears. The same goes for a *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign, particularly those where the GM has decided technology is “background noise” rather than a central plot point.

Whatever the GM decides, he or she should pay attention to another aspect of Clarke’s Law that is sometimes overlooked — magic. Technology is the magic of a space opera setting. That is important to remember, because nearly all successful role-playing game settings include some form of magic, whether it be genuine sorcery, espionage gadgetry, or advanced technology. These things are “magic” in two senses. First, they allow the characters to do things that ordinary people cannot do. Second, they enhance the wonder of a setting. The latter is vitally important, since wonder draws players into a setting. It gets them excited and engages their curiosity, both of which are essential to any role-playing campaign. Even when the GM decides to minimise the importance of technology as a plot element in his or her campaign, he or she should never underestimate its value as “magic.” There is no need for technology to resolve every plot (which is just bad storytelling), but it should still have a role to play. Otherwise, why use a space opera setting instead of a fantasy one?



DESIGNING TECHNOLOGY

Once the GM has decided the role technology will play in his or her campaign, the next stage is actually designing it. The assignment of game mechanics to technological devices is fairly simple. *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* includes many Technological Attributes and Defects (including some solely for weapons or mecha) that the GM can use to construct these devices. Another aspect of design, however, is appropriateness. A good GM should consider carefully whether or not to allow a particular type of technological device in his or her campaign. Would including a disintegrator pistol, for example, upset the feel of the game by making combat too deadly? In some settings, that might not be a problem. For example, a game that focuses on courtly intrigue on the imperial throne world of Neo-Kyoto might downplay combat, in which case the disintegrator pistol would be no worse than a simple laser pistol. On the other hand, a swashbuckling campaign in which the characters are all happy-go-lucky space pirates would probably include lots of cinematic combats, where the risk of death is minimal. In such a campaign, a disintegrator pistol would probably not be appropriate.

AVAILABILITY

Sometimes, a GM might wish to allow the existence of a particular kind of technology for consistency sake, but wishes to make it quite rare for story reasons. In such a case, the GM would be wise to tinker with the availability of such technologies. For example, the campaign might include nanotechnological medicine that allows doctors to rebuild cells on the molecular level — a very powerful technology! Taken to an extreme, this medicine might allow near-perfect immortality, which the GM wishes to avoid, since it would undermine the drama of his or her campaign. In such a case, the GM can choose either to ban nanotechnology completely (which might well deprive him or her of other applications of the same technology) or find a way to limit the medicine's availability. Perhaps the medicine has unintended side effects, like psychosis, or the dominant religion of the Galactic Empire considers its use immoral. Maybe it is simply very expensive, which is why only the imperial aristocracy use this immortality treatment. The GM should never overlook the dramatic potential of making a desirable technology rare or difficult to obtain. After all, finding a way to get hold of this restricted nanotech medicine to save a dying comrade makes a great basis for an adventure, especially if agents of AMICor are trying to prevent the characters from succeeding.

IMPORTANT TECHNOLOGIES TO CONSIDER

“Technology” is a very broad term and covers a lot of ground, even today. When one includes lots of speculative or outright fictional technologies, the term becomes broader still. When creating a space opera setting, the GM should think about the kinds of technologies he or she will include in the game. Naturally, not all of the following technologies need be considered, let alone included, but the sections below provide a good

basis for approaching the question. If nothing else, they offer food for thought in the way of explanations and advice on how to integrate certain advanced technologies into a setting, as well as the seeds for adventures — or entire campaigns.

COMPUTERS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Computers have been a staple of space opera since the dawn of the genre, long before the technology had entered common usage elsewhere. The earliest space opera stories featured gigantic computers, filling many rooms and requiring dozens of men and women to operate. This immensity is one of the reasons that starships in old-fashioned space opera were so vast themselves (the other was that they just looked cool). Living in the 21st century as we do, it is hard to credit such a vision of computers. For us, computers are small and manageable and will probably become only smaller as time goes on. After all, personal data assistants are already quite popular and many are more powerful than the computers used to put astronauts on the Moon!

In a space opera campaign, the GM should consider how powerful and ubiquitous computers are. Most anime assume small, powerful, and commonplace computers. In some cases, they are small enough to wear or have implanted inside a character's body. In settings like this, the characters will have easy access to lots of information, particularly if there is a global (or larger) data network of some sort that they can use. This can make it hard to keep the characters in the dark, unless access is restricted, such as by a dictatorial government or corporation. Likewise, small computers make it easier for the characters to enhance their abilities in other ways, such as using the computer to hack into a secure mainframe.

A perfectly valid option is to create a retro-tech setting where computers are quite large and bulky. Such a setting would have a Golden Age of Science Fiction feel to it, which is quite legitimate. Many anime series hearken back to this earlier time, employing its aesthetics and feel for dramatic effect. In games that have a fairytale quality to them, retro-tech can work as well, helping to remind the players that they are not in a realistic future but a stylised one where story trumps plausibility.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Another consideration, discussed in Chapter 3 of this book, is whether computers can be truly sentient. Artificially intelligent computers and robots are common in space opera anime. They frequently behave much like human beings, except perhaps without emotions. The question of whether artificial intelligence is possible is both a scientific and philosophical one. If sentience can be reproduced in a machine, what does that say about human beings? Does it lessen the uniqueness of living creatures? What about the soul? Does it have no place in a world where robots can be sentient? Such questions can become central themes of a space opera campaign, especially a melodramatic one. A robot character, for example, might struggle with the nature of its existence or have to prove its worth to a galactic society that considers it property rather than a person. Alternately, these

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issues might not even come up at all. Not all space opera is moody and introspective and in such settings an artificially intelligent computer might raise no more comment than a green-skinned alien from Altair IV. This perfectly valid approach is just as true to the genre as the one described previously.

COMMUNICATIONS

In a space opera setting, there are two primary types of communications devices: local and interstellar. Local allows a character to contact someone on the same planet or perhaps even star system as him or herself. They are the science fictional equivalents of telephones or e-mail. Often, they have an unusual form, such as a videophone or holographic projection, but that depends greatly on the general level of technology of the setting. An interstellar communicator is used to contact characters on other worlds or on board starships that are travelling at high speeds toward another part of the galaxy. They too can have unusual forms. Interstellar communicators are different from local communicators in that they are rarely owned by individuals and are generally not portable. Most interstellar communicators are found aboard starship but planet-based ones exist as well.

Before introducing any type of communications device, the GM should ask one question: how isolated does he or she want the characters to be? If there is no problem with the characters calling up Star Command to ask for instructions whenever they are in



doubt, there is no reason to limit the effectiveness of FTL radio, for example. On the other hand, if the GM wants the captain and crew of the *ISS Akagi* cut off from the rest of the Empire while they explore the Halloran Cluster, it would be best if FTL radio was slow and ineffective. The same principle holds true for local communications, although it is harder to justify limiting its effectiveness, since even in the 21st century it is not difficult to contact another person almost anywhere in the world if they have access to a telephone.

NANOTECHNOLOGY

Nanotechnology is currently nothing more than a putative technology. Depending on whom you believe, it may in fact be nothing more than a pipe dream. This has not stopped many science fiction authors from latching on to the idea and popularising it in their stories, which is why it is included in this chapter. According to its proponents, nanotechnology is based on the idea that any chemically stable structure can also be constructed. Nanotech theory proposes a device called an “assembler.” An assembler is a sub-microscopic robot capable of holding and positioning reactive compounds to control the precise location at which chemical reactions take place. The creation of assemblers will allow for the construction of large, atomically precise objects by a sequence of precisely controlled chemical reactions. In essence, assemblers will allow humanity to build objects molecule by molecule. Furthermore, assemblers might also be able to build copies of themselves, thereby creating vast numbers of additional assemblers to continue in the work of molecular construction.

Since they will be able to copy themselves, assemblers will be inexpensive. Working together in large numbers, assemblers and more specialised nano-machines (collectively called “nanites”) will be able to build objects cheaply. By ensuring that each atom is properly placed, they will manufacture products of high quality and reliability. Leftover molecules would be subject to this strict control as well, making the manufacturing process extremely clean as well as safe.

It is easy to see why space opera has embraced the notion of nanotechnology. In many ways, it is the ultimate “magic” technology. Almost anything a GM cannot explain easily can be chalked up to nanotech. Super-strong armour? Incredible materials for a space elevator? Equipment that changes shape? All these things and more can be explained through possible nanotech applications. This makes the technology very valuable to a GM, especially if he or she wishes to run a campaign where technology is so advanced as to seem incomprehensible. Furthermore, because nanotechnology is not yet extant, it makes it easy to brush aside criticisms to the suspension of disbelief.

At the same time, the GM should be wary. The extreme versatility of nanotechnology poses risks as well. For example, if the GM allows “wild” nanites that can freely wander around seeking out raw materials to build new objects, he or she could be creating a recipe for disaster. What if the nanites did not distinguish between living and non-living objects? In principle, nanites could break down a human being into his or her constituent parts, which would be a horrible way to die. Furthermore, a cloud of flying nanites could

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be commanded to shape and reshape itself into many different kinds of objects at the whim of its controller. This gives immense power to any character that commands the cloud. Likewise, nanotechnology would make most items cheap and easy to obtain, thanks to matter compilers or nano-fabricators that convert basic raw materials into complex objects. For all these reasons and more, a GM should give careful thought to allowing nanotechnology into his or her campaign setting, since it could easily ruin many adventures or alter their dramatic balance.

HEALTH AND MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY

More so than many other technologies, health and medical technology is very much a background technology. That is, it rarely figures prominently in space opera adventures but it is always present in one form or another. When Captain Matthias Santiago is injured after facing his vicious opposite number among the Reptoids, where does he turn for assistance? Why, Dr. Thomas Mkombe, of course, because it's always good to have a friend named "Doc." More seriously, medical technology is very important to consider, since it determines how quickly characters can be healed — or even brought back from the dead!

With sufficiently advanced technology, resuscitation of this sort might be an option, even a common one. Allowing such technology is fine if the GM wants to minimise injury and death as obstacles. If, however, he or she prefers a grittier style of game, it would be wise to limit or even disallow certain very advanced medical technologies. Portability is one of the easiest ways to do this, as with so much technology. Perhaps Captain Santiago cannot be healed on the surface of Pentaris VI. He has to return to the sick bay aboard the *Crusader* before he can be healed, in which case he's in big trouble because his shuttle has been damaged and the Reptoid captain is bearing down on him. This kind of limitation works very well for dramatic purposes and provides a useful model for GMs who do not simply wish to discount advanced health and medical technology but who likewise do not want it to destroy the tension of their adventures.

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Biotechnology differs from other types of technologies described in this chapter, because it is more a "flavour" of technology than anything else. That is, biotechnology provides an explanation of how a particular piece of equipment works rather than providing the technology itself. For example, the Skellirian race might have technologies like every other advanced race — blasters, starships, replacement limbs — but they might employ biotechnology to create them. Instead of inorganic materials, like plastic or metal, Skellirian devices might be organic, living things. These aliens grow their equipment from genetically engineered creatures. Thus, their starships might be living things, perhaps even a sub-species of their own race! Their weapons might not be alive, but the ambulatory sunuma plant may excrete them when given the appropriate nutrients by the Skellirians. Other possibilities abound.

The point is that almost any other technology that exists can be conceivably reproduced through biotechnology. Choosing biotech over more conventional methods is a design choice on the part of the GM. Does he or she wish to emphasise that the Enatumi Empire is in touch with the rhythms of nature? If so, perhaps they use biotechnology. Likewise, if the GM decides that, despite their seemingly primitive society, the jungle-bound Pachkur are actually technologically advanced, biotechnology makes good sense as the basis of their devices. Biotechnology can also be creepy and frightening. Since it uses or adapts living things, evil aliens or unethical corporations might employ it, since they could care less about the consequences to the life forms they are destroying in the process. Indeed, biotechnology can make a good basis for a horror-based space opera campaign, with eldritch beings that warp their own — and others' — bodies to create living weapons and other monstrosities.

CYBERNETICS

Cybernetics refers primarily to the replacement of organic body parts with inorganic replacements. In this broad sense, it is opposed to biotechnological solutions, such as cloning or re-growth. Most often, cybernetic replacements exceed the power and versatility of the originals. A soldier who gets cybernetic arms to replace those lost in the Xeno War, for example, might find his physical strength is vastly improved. Alternately, cybernetics can give a character a capability he or she did not previously possess, such as infrared vision or protection from the effects of vacuum. In both cases, cybernetics is a means to provide space opera characters with “super powers” that set them above and beyond the average people of the setting (unless cybernetics is common, in which case the situation is obviously different).

Cybernetics has a long association with space opera anime. Often, cybernetics is presented as monstrous or inhuman, such as when a space pirate has a mechanical arm ending in a wicked hook or when corporate security goons have blaster pistols built into their forearms. At other times, cybernetics is simply a technological means to allow the character to do something dramatically necessary, such as a hacker who can directly interface with a computer. When including cybernetics, the GM should think about how society at large views this technology? Is it normal and accepted, or do people look strangely at cyborgs? Is there any kind of cultural or religious sanction against those with cybernetics attachments? Perhaps the Imperium takes away the civil rights of anyone with too much cybernetics, since they are now more machine than human. On other hand, cybernetics might be the mark of an honoured war veteran, a fashion statement of the jaded imperial aristocracy, or treated no differently than we treat pacemakers or prosthetic limbs. Whatever the answer, the GM should give some thought to these questions beforehand. Doing so will enhance his or her campaign.

POWER AND ENERGY STORAGE

For the most part, the question of power and energy storage is not a significant one in space opera. It is another background technology that rarely takes centre stage, but which

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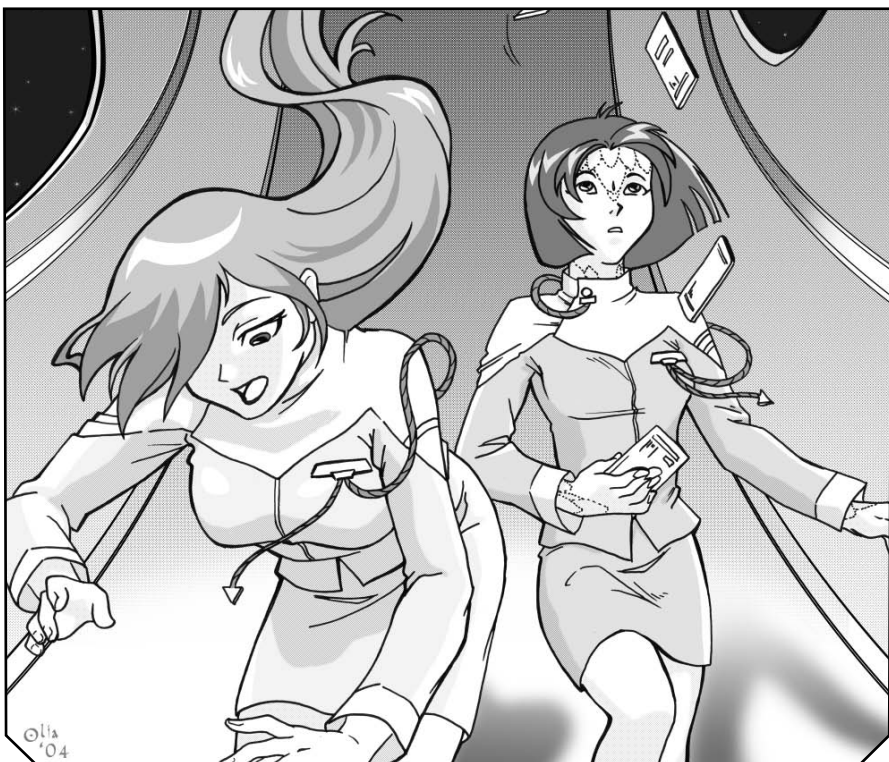
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nevertheless has repercussions for the campaign setting. For example, if fusion technology is reliable and easily portable, very powerful weapons could be constructed and used by the characters. If, however, fusion is non-existent and only chemical batteries are available, the power of personal weaponry decreases dramatically. The same holds for any other device or vehicle that employs energy in some fashion.

Power is the great limiting factor on many types of advanced technology. Even in a very advanced setting, the GM could prevent the existence of energy weapons like blasters or lasers if he or she decides that energy cells are insufficiently powerful. Therefore, if the GM prefers that the Imperial Marines use good old-fashioned assault rifles or that the Federation Rapid Reaction Force employs magnetic pistols, he or she can justify it reasonably by restricting the types of energy cells available. Starships or powered armour could also be limited or even eliminated outright if the GM decides that power storage makes these technologies impossible.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, many space opera settings use exotic energy sources to power their technology. Starships, for example, might employ antimatter or micro-black holes. In these cases, energy storage is no longer an issue, since these fanciful sources of power are almost limitless. This works best in settings where the GM doesn't wish to dwell on the whys and wherefores of power and prefers to get on with telling a good story. Alternately, an exotic power source might require equally exotic resources to function properly. What happens when the star drive on the *HMS Bellerophon* runs out



of dihydrate crystals? The crew has no choice to find a new supply — or be stranded in deep space far from the borders of the Empire. Similarly, if the character's starship loses its quantum singularity, how do they find a new one in the Dark Zone?

GRAVITY CONTROL

Space opera almost always assumes gravity control. That is why interstellar adventurers rarely float around in their starship the way that astronauts do in the real world. From a storytelling perspective, assuming artificial gravity control is much simpler. Neither the GM nor the players need to keep track of all the little details that go along with a more realistic approach. Combat alone would be quite a chore in a weightless environment, never mind one with much greater or lesser gravity than Earth normal. At the same time, not having gravity control has its advantages too. Aesthetically, the idea of huge spin habitats on space stations or starships, which is a more plausible alternative to "gravitic plates" is very appealing. Some classic works of space opera use these spinning sections of starships to good effect and there is no reason a *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign would be any different.

The Game Master should bear in mind that the existence of gravity control has other repercussions. If gravity can be manipulated to keep space travellers from floating in zero-G, what about using gravity as a weapon? What about tractor and presser beams? If there is artificial gravity on starships, it is a simple matter to create gravity belts that let characters fly like birds as well. If the GM is uncomfortable with these derivative technologies, he or she should consider limiting or disallowing gravity control in some way. Perhaps it is a restricted military technology unavailable to civilians (and therefore the characters). Perhaps it is alien "black box" technology that humans don't fully understand, so they cannot modify it beyond its original use, at least not yet.

PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

As impressive as mighty battleships and FTL communications relays are, they are no matches for the appeal of personal equipment. In space opera, it is the devices a character carries with him or her that really stands out. These define a character in a way, since they are extensions of that character's own abilities. Commodore Holmes is never without his trusty blaster at his side and Dr. Lanicas is better able to detect unusual mineral deposits if she has her quadrecorder with her on a mission. These pieces of equipment enable space opera characters to define themselves and use their talents to the utmost. Consequently, they should never be overlooked, even if their game effects are negligible. Having such "props" around helps a character to shine, so that their role in the campaign, whether it be hotheaded space pirate or cerebral scientist, is well established in the minds of the players.

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GEAR

For the purposes of this section, “gear” includes any piece of personal equipment that is not a weapon or armour. Therefore, everything from a communications satellite to a laser welder to a tool kit qualifies as gear. Chapter 3 discusses the Personal Gear Attribute, including the division between Minor and Major Items. Space opera is replete with examples of gear, making it impossible to include a list of such devices from which a GM can choose. In creating gear, the GM should consider the type and ubiquity of the technologies he or she has allowed for the setting, as well as the ease of creating portable versions of them. Power and energy storage are thus important considerations when creating gear.

WEAPONRY

Perhaps unsurprisingly, weaponry, both personal and vehicular, is important in space opera, with the genre’s emphasis on action and adventure. Anime includes many different types of weapons, from lasers to plasma weapons to sonic blasters. From the perspective of the Tri-Stat rules, most weapons differ from one another in their special effects more than in their function. A laser pistol destroys its target very differently than a plasma pistol, even if both do 20 points of damage. Therefore, it is up to the GM to make each type of weapon feel unique through his or her descriptions in the course of a game. Another way to distinguish them is through the use of Weapon Attack Abilities and Disabilities. These go beyond simple description and give players the chance to use genuinely different weapons, with game effects that make a difference in play.

ARMOUR

Many space opera settings include very effective body armour to counter the equally powerful weapons of the setting. Advanced technologies like nanotech (or even cybernetics or biotechnology) can easily provide a rationale for such armour. In game play, armour exists to keep weapons in check, so that the characters are not killed the first time they encounter the Black Hole Gang’s mighty disruptor pistols in combat. Of course, if the GM wishes to favour weapons over armour, he or she is welcome to do so, since this serves the feel of some settings, especially if the GM prefers to downplay combat. The lack of viable body armour certainly gives the characters pause before entering combat with enemies armed with deadly firearms. If the body armour is quite powerful, it might be better represented by the Own a Big Mecha Special Attribute (see *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*.) Armour of this calibre is extremely potent, being more like a small vehicle than simple protection. Nevertheless, armour of this sort is very much in keeping with space opera anime and is a good addition to many campaigns, particularly those that emphasise armed struggles between the characters and their opponents.

VEHICLES AND MECHA

The need for speed has always been a part of space opera, especially anime, which often import elements of sport racing and hot-rodding into the far future. Due to this, vehicles play an important role in many settings. Like personal equipment, vehicles are sometimes strongly associated with the characters that pilot them — it's hard to think of the space smuggler and his hairy companion without also thinking of their “fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy” starship. A daredevil member of Crimson Squadron might customise his star fighter according to his own specifications, while Princess Aeon might prefer that her consular vessel be a chrome-covered work of art. In both cases, the vehicles reveal something about the characters that use them. Vehicles also serve other dramatic purposes, such as allowing the characters to cross great distances or overcome obstacles, which are equally important to the campaign. Finally, vehicles give players a glimpse into the society of the setting, showing how people transport themselves and other items.

GROUND VEHICLES

Ground vehicles are simple devices and exist at all levels of technological advancement. Primitive cultures use riding animals or carts to move from place to place, while more sophisticated ones might use powered vehicles like automobiles. Unless artificial gravity control exists, ground vehicles will probably be the norm on most worlds, even in a space opera setting. These vehicles might not take familiar forms. Walking vehicles or articulated trains, for example, might be used on some planets, because of local environmental conditions. In any event, ground vehicles provide lots of potential for excitement, with chases through crowded streets or treks across desolate terrain being popular diversions in space opera adventures.

AIRCRAFT

Unless they become extraordinarily inexpensive for some reason, most aircraft will not be private vehicles, even in a space opera setting. They will remain much as they are today — the purview of the rich and powerful, or of corporations and governments. Airplanes and helicopters offer many opportunities for excitement. A race amid the towering skyscrapers of the Imperial Capital is even more impressive by air and a dogfight between airplanes is always a great source of drama. Aircraft allow the characters to cross even greater distances quickly, which is why they are very useful to a GM hoping to speed up a long journey across a planet's surface. Large aircraft are also very useful as locations for scenes. A battle aboard an aircraft careening out of control is nothing if not dramatic!

SPACECRAFT

Spacecraft are so important that Chapter 5 devotes a large portion of its contents to the topic. Nevertheless, here are a few points to consider. Like aircraft, spacecraft are likely to be very expensive. If player characters are to own them, the GM needs to explain

this in some fashion. Did the owner win it in a card game with some smugglers? Did he inherit it? Maybe he stole it and the original owners are chasing him across the galaxy to reclaim it. Of course, in many campaigns, a government or corporation owns the characters' spacecraft. This is especially true in military or exploration campaigns, where the spacecraft is large and sophisticated — well beyond the means of even the wealthiest of characters. Due to their often large size, entire campaigns can be set aboard a spacecraft without ever leaving its environs. Huge generation ships, for example, might include a wide variety of onboard environments, such as forests or fields, making them little self-contained worlds in their own right — more than enough space to hold many adventures or even an entire campaign.

POWERED ARMOUR

Although powered armour (often referred to simply as “mecha”) are covered extensively in *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*, a few brief words are in order. As a vehicle, mecha are little different from most other vehicles except that is so closely associated with anime space opera that a GM should always consider the possibility of including it in his or her campaign. This is not to say that it must be included, but if it is not, the GM should know why. Some space opera settings are not well served by the presence of mecha. Mecha is very cinematic and not suited to games with a grittier, more realistic feel. On the other hand, many players expect mecha in their *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* games. If the GM wishes to preclude it, he or she should be certain that the players are comfortable with this arrangement. There are few things worse than disappointing a player's expectations about a campaign setting.

ROBOTS, ANDROIDS, AND CYBORGS

While not strictly vehicles, robots, androids, and cyborgs are included here because they all may be created using the Own a Big Mecha Special Attribute (see *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*). They can also be created as characters, which is why they are also discussed in Chapter 3. For the purposes of *BESM Space Fantasy*, a robot is a mechanical construct built to perform a variety of tasks either under the command of a human being or on its own (if artificially intelligent). An android is an artificial person created by genetic engineering, which is generally of human shape but can come in other forms, including that of an animal. A cyborg is a living creature that has been extensively modified through the addition of cybernetic enhancements (see page 69).

The presence of any or all of these technologies is entirely up to the Game Master. They are all quite common in space opera anime and form the basis of many plots as well. Of course, their inclusion can be problematic, if the GM wishes to consider the ramifications. Are androids and robots free beings or are they effectively slaves? Do they have free will? If they are widely used instead of human beings, what does that do to the economy? What if the robots decided to revolt against human control? These questions are just the tip of the iceberg. If they are capable of fighting in a war, do human/alien soldiers

enter combat and put their lives at risk? Unless the GM wishes to sidestep the issues of the role and function of artificial beings, not to mention the morality of their creation and use, he or she should give some thought to these matters. Answering them can produce a richer setting, as well as provide fodder for many adventures.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES

Even in a space opera setting, there is still cutting edge technology that is beyond the capabilities of most widely used devices. Over time, the cutting edge becomes commonplace and accepted, just as computers are now so ubiquitous as to go unnoticed most of the time. Once, though, a computer was an expensive and rare item. No one owned their own computer and their use was restricted to workplaces or government offices. In the future, what might be considered cutting edge technology? Perhaps mecha is new and used only by the most skilled fighter pilots, while the rest use old style spacecraft. What would that do to the setting? Would mecha pilots be considered the elite, the object of envy for their peers. If robot armies are just coming into use by an alien empire, they might be seen as the height of technological advancement and sow terror among their enemies.

Technology, as has been noted throughout this chapter, can form the basis of many exciting plots. Introducing an advanced technology is a clear example of this. There is little point in a GM's postulating some device that is more impressive than the run of the mill variety unless he or she has some plot purpose in doing so. Advanced technology can inspire awe or jealousy or fear. It can be used as a way to emphasise the power of a character or empire or to encourage the player characters to achieve great deeds in pursuit of it. The important point to bear in mind is that, unless the GM assumes a stagnant future without any technological growth, there will always be bigger and better examples of technology. Before including them, the Game Master should think about why he or she is doing so and its effects on the campaign.

ANCIENT ARTEFACTS

Frequently, space opera postulates the existence of extinct alien races that existed thousands or millions of years in the past. These aliens are responsible for all sorts of wonders, from building giant artificial worlds to seeding life on worlds throughout the galaxy. Consequently, artefacts of these ancient aliens are usually far in advance of that commonly available. They are the ultimate in cutting edge and are avidly sought after by archaeologists, fortune hunters, and government agents alike. Ancient artefacts are often portrayed as "magical" in nature, since they defy widely held physical laws or act in ways inexplicable to science. In some settings, the discovery of an alien ship gives humanity the technological leg up it needs to develop its own advanced technologies. *Macross* offers a good example of this approach, but there are many others in anime and literature. A good GM will take care not to overuse ancient artefacts, since they can quickly lose their power and mystery this way. At the same time, they make excellent plot devices and so should not be overlooked in a *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign, whatever its setting.

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CHAPTER 5: STARSHIPS



Space opera is nearly synonymous with starships. While it is not strictly necessary for a *BESM Space Fantasy* setting to have starships, it would be a rare setting that does not include them. Even in campaigns where the characters are not starship pilots or interstellar explorers, starships will certainly exist, if only because they provide the means for members of many different species to interact on myriad planets. Without reliable, faster than light travel, a campaign is limited to a single world or solar system, which makes it somewhat different than traditional space opera. This is not to say that such a campaign cannot be extremely enjoyable and true to anime space opera, but it will differ from much of the source material on which this book is based. Consequently, the Game Master should give some thought to the types and frequency of starships in his or her campaign.

SPACE FLIGHT AND STAR FLIGHT

Big Eyes, Small Mouth distinguishes between Space Flight and Star Flight. Both are Attributes, but Space Flight is simple interplanetary flight within a single solar system, while Star Flight is genuine interplanetary flight at faster than light speeds. Before giving any consideration as to how he or she will use them in a space opera campaign, the GM should read the appropriate sections of the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* rulebook. Armed with that knowledge, he or she can then examine the options available and make the decisions that will shape the very nature of the campaign setting.

OPTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

The first consideration is a simple one: does FTL travel exist? As noted above, it is a rare space opera setting that does not include interstellar travel. The reasons for this are many, but one of the most obvious is scope. Space opera is a grand, epic genre. Everything is big and diverse. The galaxy is a large place. Almost anything could be found within it if one looks with sufficient vigour. This makes it easy for a GM to justify the existence of the Zoroquai Insect-Men or the Ringworld of Rossika. They are found somewhere *out there*, which is usually enough explanation for a space opera setting. If the GM decides against FTL travel, then he or she is limited to a single solar system or a few closely connected systems (in which case journeys between them will still take months or even years!). This approach can have advantages, especially if the GM wishes to limit the movements of the characters, which can have many dramatic benefits.

Of course, limiting or disallowing FTL travel can have drawbacks as well. If the GM wishes to include aliens in his or her setting, how can they be explained? Perhaps the aliens arrived in our solar system after centuries aboard a giant generation ship. Now, they are effectively stranded among humans and must learn to adapt to our societies and cultures. Alternately, humanity might stumble upon ancient Martians who have been in hibernation beneath their world's surface for aeons, awakening only when the first Earth explorers stumbled upon their underground cities. Another possibility is that human beings are the "aliens," having travelled by slower than light vessels to colonise another star system, only to discover it was already inhabited. Without FTL travel, many space opera elements are

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difficult or impossible to explain. So long as the GM is aware of this and comfortable with it, sticking with ordinary space flight is a viable option.

No matter which kinds of flight the GM allows, he or she should be prepared to explain how they work. Whether a spaceship uses an “ion drive” or “solar sails,” for example is an important piece of background information that lends flavour to the setting. Now, the GM need not know precisely how such flight works. Only the most obsessive of players would expect that. Nevertheless, space opera revels in techno-babble and pseudo-science. The best examples of the genre employ consistent terminology and explanations, so as to immerse the players into the setting. Having this sort of consistency makes it easier to make trouble with the warp the basis for an exciting plot. Finally, the GM might decide there are several different working types of star travel. Each might have its own advantages and disadvantages. That the Vhrition Empire uses antimatter-powered space folds to travel distinguishes it from the Genesis Commonwealth, which uses jump gates. Again, these little details lend flavour and the appearance of depth to the setting — keys to long-term player interest.

SIZE, DISTANCE, AND SPEED

Whatever kinds of flight the GM decides to include, there are three very important questions he or she must ask: how big is the drive, how far can it go, and how fast can it go? In many ways, these are much more significant questions than how the drive works, because they have much more immediate consequences. The size of a drive determines the size of space vessels to some extent. If a warp drive is huge, then the only FTL-capable vessels will be giant starships. If, on the other hand, the drive is small, even fighters will be capable of interstellar flight. Distance is related to fuel: how far can a hyperdrive take a ship before it needs more deuterium? The GM should consider this limiting factor with care. If he or she wants to force the characters to stop at a planet to refuel every so often, restricting the distance a drive can go is one way to do that. Speed is another factor to bear in mind. How many light-years can a space fold vessel travel in a single jump? Many space opera settings assume an unlimited speed, which gives the characters a lot of freedom, but it can be a headache for a GM who prefers to keep a tight rein on the action in his or her campaign. Likewise, unlimited speed makes interstellar borders impossible, since an enemy fleet can simply travel directly to the core system of the Federation and besiege its capital without hindrance. This may be fine in some settings. Others will not work according to these rules, which is why a GM should weigh the consequences of every aspect of how a space drive works in a space opera setting.

DESIGNING STARSHIPS

Since starships are so important to many space opera settings, their design deserves some careful thought and consideration. There are two basic approaches to starship design in *BESM Space Fantasy*, depending on how the Game Master wishes to present these vehicles in his or her game. The first approach is the simpler one, because it requires no game mechanics. In this approach, starships are more like props or sets in movies and television shows. They exist to provide a locale for the game’s action to take place, but they don’t participate in the action themselves.

Suppose, for example, the characters are all crewmembers aboard the *FSS Magellan*, a huge exploratory vessel sent by the Federal Space Fleet to chart the unknown stars of the Hollis Cluster. Since the *Magellan* is such a huge ship, it is more like a spaceborne city than a vessel. The GM can easily set many adventures on the ship itself, without ever sending the characters down to the surface of a planet as part of a landing party. Moreover, the *Magellan* rarely engages in combat, since the Hollis Cluster isn't home to any advanced cultures with space travel technology. There is little point for the GM to produce game statistics for the ship. They are an unnecessary complication to the campaign. In this approach, starships are means to travelling from place to place. They are locales where the characters live and work. They have no other role except as dramatic devices.

The second approach is more complex, because it involves creating game stats for the starships. Under the *BESM* rules, starships (and indeed all vehicles) can be designed with the Own a Big Mecha Special Attribute. Nearly every possible Attribute or Defect that a GM needs is already included in *BESM*, allowing the GM to create any sort of starship or vehicle he or she wishes, with minimum difficulty.

As in the simpler method, the GM should consider the role that a starship will play in the campaign. If, for example, the colony ship *Santa Maria* appears only for a short time in the game and never becomes involved in combat, there is little need to design stats for it. On the other hand, in a military-based campaign, the stats of the battleship *Musashi* are vitally important. They will be used regularly in play, which is why the GM should take the time and effort to design them as completely as possible. So long as the GM considers how a starship will be used in his or her campaign, unnecessary bookkeeping will be avoided, which leaves more time to play the game.

STARSHIP COMBAT

Battles between starships are a staple of space opera. They are usually presented as exciting set pieces, with incredible pyrotechnics and loud explosions (despite the latter's physical impossibility). Combat, whether they be ponderous slugfests between capital ships or fast-paced dogfights between fighters, exists to advance the plot of an adventure. Perhaps the characters are fleeing the clutches of Lord Bane, right hand man of the evil God Emperor, and they find themselves caught in an asteroid field while swarms of imperial star fighters seek them out. Perhaps they are surprised by the Neutron Pirates while exploring the Space Sargasso and must fight or be captured by the vicious cutthroats. These and other such situations are perfect times for space combat to occur. Space opera games thrive on fast-paced action. If there is another way for the Game Master to describe the action than through space combat, he or she should consider it. Gratuitous combats not only slow the game down, they also undermine the drama of combats that actually have significance for the plot.

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GAME MASTERING SPACE BATTLES

In anime, starship combat is fast and furious. It is also not especially realistic, but that is beside the point. The same is true in *BESM Space Fantasy*. In running starship combats, the GM should spend more time on his or her descriptions of the combat than on dice rolls. Describe the scene in all its glory. Paint a picture in words of the Z-100 fighter as it weaves and barrel rolls while being pursued by the Lumar attack craft. Play up the environment by detailing the debris field in which the fight takes place or how the imperial starships fire their disruptor beams in unison. The real secret to making an enjoyable starship combat comes from the “special effects,” the way the GM describes what is occurring. If the GM takes pains to add colourful descriptions, he or she will draw the players into the game. It’s always better to say “The fighter dodges your quad laser cannon, as it flies behind the command tower of the nearest destroyer, where it makes it a tight spin and whirls around, with its own lasers now bearing down on you” than “You miss, so now it’s the enemy fighter’s turn to attack.”

Another key to good starship combat is involving the characters in every possible way. Try to find ways to use Skills other than just Heavy Weapons, Ranged Defence, or Pilot in combat. This is very important on board large vessels, where more than one character is involved. Rather than having the captain do everything, perhaps she issues the commands but it is the other characters that make their Skill rolls to determine success or failure. Maybe the Science Officer needs to use his Electronics to lock sensors on the enemy craft. Perhaps the Engineer can use his Mechanics skill to do repairs or transfer energy from the weapons to increase the effectiveness of the shields. This approach makes everyone feel like they have a role to play, which is very important. Even when there is only one character in a ship (such as in a fighter craft), the GM should remember that the character is more important than her spacecraft. The ship is just a tool, so direct everything, especially descriptions, at the character. He or she is the focus of all the action, even when there are dozens of ships skimming the surface of a giant space station.

Simplicity is another key to space opera combat. In fact, it is essential when the GM has to keep track of many starships in the course of a single battle. Complications like weapons ranges and facing, for example, should be dispensed with, if possible. They add nothing but time to a battle, which is the bane of space opera space combats. In the end, it is better that a GM ignores rules to speed up play than skimp on descriptions and player involvement.

HOW TO RUN SPACE BATTLES

The key thing to remember is that the focus of most space opera battles is not on the entire battle but the actions of specific characters within the battle. Most anime (and space opera in general) gloss over the hundreds or thousands of ships involved in a space battle and focus on the half-dozen or so key characters and their efforts to win the day. *BESM Space Fantasy* games should be handled in the exact same manner. The GM should have an idea of how the battle will play out in the end (ideally in a way that furthers the plot in the direction the GM wants to story to unfold) and describe events as they work towards that conclusion. He or she should not worry about the two dozen capital ships, hundreds of space cruisers,

thousands of star fighters, and one massive battle station. Focus, instead, on the characters in their star fighters or space cruiser and play out their role in the battle. In most instances, the characters will have a vital role to play in the battle, such as disabling the opponent's main power generator or the like. The entire battle hinges on their actions and thus the focus of the game should be that. The fact that several capital ships are pounding each other into space debris in the background should merely be descriptive elements that the GM uses while describing the events surrounding the characters. Don't let your space opera battles turn into war games because that is not what space opera is about.

PLANET BUSTERS

In keeping with space opera's epic qualities, planet-busting weapons are very common in the genre. Many villains or evil aliens use huge weapons to destroy entire planets in a single blast. Whether mounted on a giant starship or on a mobile space station of equally immense size, planet busters are the ultimate weapons in space opera. While they are a trope of the genre, they are rarely used — and with good reason. If the villains used these doomsday weapons with impunity, there would be no hope for the heroes. Consequently, planet busters often work better as plot devices or hooks, with the heroes trying desperately to prevent the bad guys from ever using their Turbo-Laser against the rebel headquarters, for example. If the GM wants to show the villains really mean business, he or she might allow them to destroy a planet or two as a show of their power. Rules for blowing up worlds are included in *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*. Nevertheless, the GM should use planet busters sparingly and only when dramatically appropriate. Otherwise, they lose their value and the players quickly become inured to the danger the Death Station poses to freedom in the galaxy.

NEW MECHA OPTIONS

Following are a few new options that can be used for mecha creation. Some (such as the new Special Attack Ability) can also be used for characters.

NEW MECHA ATTRIBUTE

LINKED SYSTEMS

Cost: 2 Points/Level

Relevant Stat: None

Type: Mecha

The mecha's systems are inter-connected in a way that allows one to divert energy from one system to bolster the effectiveness of another system. In most cases, starship captains will divert power from unneeded systems to bolster defensive systems in times of conflict.

The player may divert Mecha Points from one system (Attribute) to another. Diverted Mecha Points alter the effective Level of the two systems, reducing one while increasing the other. For example, a starship pilot decides that he's taking a pounding and he needs to increase his ship's Force Field. He diverts power from the warp drive (Star Flight Attribute)

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into the force field (Force Field Attribute). His Star Flight is Level 4 so he has 8 Mecha Points available. He needs all the power he can get so he diverts all power (all 8 MP) to the force field, thereby increasing it's Level by 2 (since Force Field costs 4 Points/Level). While his force field is bolstered he is unable to make the jump to light speed, however, since his Star Flight is now reduced to Level 0.

• LINKED SYSTEMS •

- Level 1 Two Attributes are linked allowing Point transfers between the two.
- Level 2 Three Attributes are linked allowing Point transfers between any of the three.
- Level 3 Four Attributes are linked allowing Point transfers between any of the four.
- Level 4 Five Attributes are linked allowing Point transfers between any of the five.
- Level 5 Six Attributes are linked allowing Point transfers between any of the six.
- Level 6 Seven Attributes are linked allowing Point transfers between any of the seven.

NEW MECHA DEFECT

FRAGILE SYSTEMS

Type: Mecha

One of the mecha's systems are fragile and prone to being disabled as the mecha suffers damage. When assigned, the character must specify which of the mecha's Attributes this Defect applies to. For each 15 points of damage the mecha suffers, the Attribute has the number of Mecha Points assigned to it reduced. This results in the Attribute decreasing in Level. For example, a starship has Space Flight at Level 5 and Fragile Systems: Space Flight at 2 BP. In combat, it suffers 30 points of damage, thereby reducing the MP assigned to Space Flight by 4 points. The Space Flight Attribute decreases to Level 3 (since Space Flight costs 2 Points/Level). Later in the fight, it suffers a nasty blast that inflicts 60 points of damage. This reduces Space Flight by 8 Points, thereby dropping Space Flight to Level zero. The mecha is now immobile until the system is repaired.

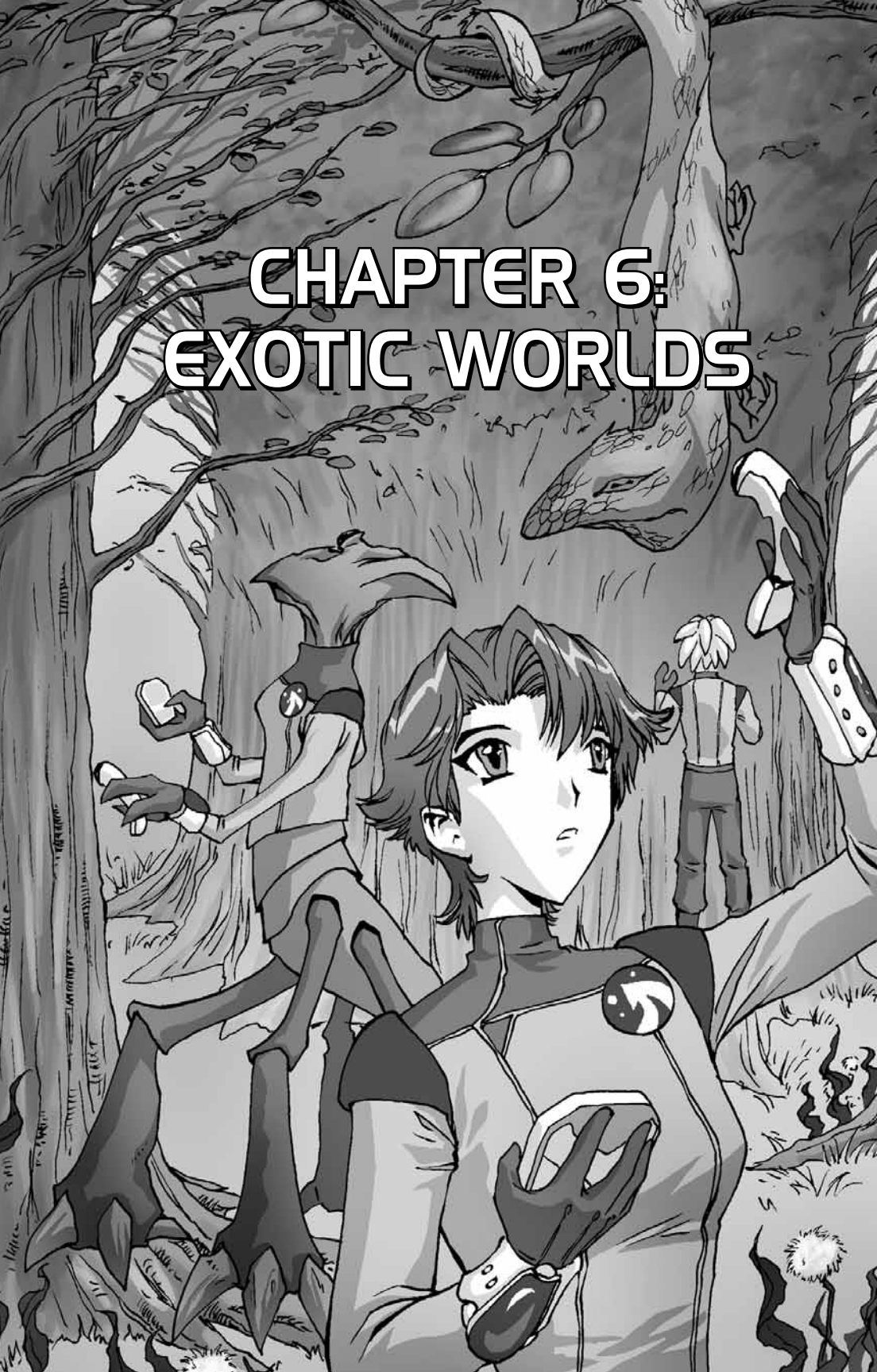
Mecha Points are repaired at the same rate that the ship is repaired. For example, the above ship which had it's Space Flight reduced to Level zero would gain 2 Mecha Points back into Space Flight per 15 points of damage repaired to the ship. Thus, the Space Flight Attribute would be returned to normal after 75 points of damage was repaired.

NEW SPECIAL/WEAPON ATTACK ABILITY

IMPROVED CRITICALS

The attack (or weapon) is very effective at inflicting massive damage. When the character scores a critical hit, the damage multiplier is increased by one. For example, if the attacker hits and gains a x3 damage critical, the damage multiplier is increased to x4. One may assign this Ability more than once with each additional assignment further increasing the damage multiplier by 1. It may not be assigned to a Special/Weapon Attack more than three times.

CHAPTER 6: EXOTIC WORLDS



EXOTIC WORLDS

Travelling to other worlds is one of the basic premises of space opera. The assumption is that the galaxy is filled with thousands upon thousands of worlds, each of them filled with possibilities for adventure. While not all of them can support human life, many of them can do so. Even those that cannot might one day be home to Earth colonies of one sort or another. Alien worlds are one of the foundations of the genre. As such, using them in a space opera game requires a little thought beforehand.

WORLD CONSIDERATIONS

Like so many elements of the space opera genre, exotic worlds are simply a given. Even before science had provided any evidence that other worlds existed, space opera stories had already populated the universe with myriad planets for humanity to explore and conquer. Other worlds serve numerous purposes in a space opera game, each of which needs to be considered before introducing them. Their presence also requires the GM to understand a few basic principles of world design.

USING AND DESIGNING EXOTIC WORLDS

Exotic worlds in space opera serve two important purposes. The first is the most obvious: they are places where adventures can take place. Consequently, the GM should never forget that these worlds should serve a dramatic purpose before any other. As one would guess, space opera worlds are not necessarily plausible places. They usually lack the diversity and depth that Earth possesses. Instead, they are defined by a handful of characteristics that make them memorable — and useful from a dramatic perspective. For example, Loryan III is a desert planet while Kreo is an ice world. If the GM is telling a story that requires the characters engage in a long trek across an arid plain, then he or she will choose Loryan III as its locale. If, on the other hand, his interest is in a high-speed sled chase down the slopes of a glacier, Kreo would be more appropriate. Space opera worlds operate according to the exigencies of drama rather than science. Their presence in a game should reflect their use.

The other purpose that exotic worlds have is to be exotic. Again, this may seem obvious, but it should be mentioned nonetheless. Space opera revels in its over the top nature. The galaxy is a big place, after all. What better way to show this than to present strange and unusual worlds with bizarre environments and peculiar inhabitants? Thus, Thermia is alive with volcanism, as huge rivers of lava plow their way through the planet's surface and ash and smoke cloud the air. A planet such as this is a great headquarters for the evil Night Brothers space pirate gang. Meanwhile, the planet Oceanus is a water world without even a single island on its surface. Its inhabitants live in undersea habitats and fend off the giant megalodons that swim in its waters. Having the characters come here to conclude a business transaction with the Neptune Corporation would certainly show what an exciting place the galaxy really is.

Together, these two purposes highlight a truth about space opera: it is the story that is important. This is not to say that the GM should not consider other factors, but those factors are clearly secondary to storytelling. In the average space opera game, the characters spend very little time on a single world. They flit from planet to planet with ease, sometimes visiting a half-dozen different worlds in a single adventure. To ensure that each one is memorable, they should all possess at least one defining characteristic, preferably more. This characteristic is a shorthand way to remember the planet. Thus, Axion is the city planet or Zentar is the mining world. These shorthand tags stick in the players' minds and help to define the worlds for them, which is essential. With so many worlds to choose from, they can easily get lost in the shuffle if the GM fails to make them memorable.

Certainly, there is a place for scientific plausibility in designing worlds. There is no reason to throw all common sense to the wind. In fact, in some kinds of space, such as exploratory games, it is often a good idea to make a few nods to science. Barlon VI might be a more suitable place for exploration adventures if the GM gives some consideration to the high concentration of fluorine in its atmosphere. Likewise, the amount of molybdenum beneath Valdri's surface might become important in a game where mining is a significant activity. These kinds of details can add spice to a game. They can also help the players to suspend their disbelief at other elements of the setting, such as the shapeshifting Gamii assassins who are pursuing them at the behest of the Scarlet Queen.



In the end, the GM should design exotic worlds with an eye toward their purpose in the game he or she is planning. If worlds are nothing more than a temporary stopover point between jaunts in space, there is little need to describe them in copious detail. On the other hand, if there are only a handful of worlds in the Terran Alliance, it makes good sense to come up with more than their names. Knowing how large the planets are, what sorts of atmospheres they have, how big their populations are, and other such details will become important. The game's style and concept are likewise important. As already noted, exploration games need to know more about a world — such as its gravity, geological makeup, etc. — than the basics. Military games might not need to know anything except insofar as the world's nature poses a hazard to the characters' battle against their foes. Other types of games will require different sorts of information.

WORLD DESIGN CHECKLIST

Even though every space opera game is unique and has different emphases, there are enough similarities to create a checklist for designing exotic worlds. What follows is a short rundown of the details a GM should consider when creating a world for his or her *BESM Space Fantasy* campaign. Naturally, a GM is free to ignore those details he or she feels are unimportant or irrelevant, since, as noted in the previous sections, what is important in one game may not be important in another. Even in rejecting one of the following elements as unimportant, though, the GM is nevertheless helping to flesh out the game's setting. If, for example, he or she decides to ignore atmospheric type and assume that every world possesses a breathable oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, that decision says a lot about the game setting — either that humanity only colonises garden worlds like Earth or that human technology is so impressive that terraforming is routine throughout the galaxy.

STAR TYPE

Strictly speaking, this is not a question about the planet itself but the star it orbits. Space opera rarely pays much heed to the differences between a yellow type G star and a green type F star except as a special effect. Such details are usually unimportant. Even so, having a sense of the star's colour, size, and age can be important if only to add the background details that good space opera depends on. It is also much more memorable if the ancient capital world of the defunct Xonen Empire now orbits a sullen red giant star than if the GM omitted such a detail. Little touches like this are very important to creating rich environment for adventure.

SIZE

How big is the planet? Is it small like Mercury or huge like Jupiter? Extremely large terrestrial planets (as opposed to gas giants) are probably unlikely, but they could exist in a space opera setting. If they do, does anyone take notice of it or is it just a fact of the setting upon which no one comments? The size of a world generally determines its gravity, with smaller planets having lower gravities than Earth-normal. Again, space opera sometimes ignores these details. Alternately, an unusually dense world — perhaps with a heavy metallic core — might have normal gravity despite its small size.

ATMOSPHERE

What kind of atmosphere does the world have? Size is important here too, since the larger the planet, the heavier its atmosphere. Planets without heavy atmospheres are probably more like Mars than Earth. Even if the world is large, there is no reason its atmosphere should be breathable by human beings. Perhaps its composed of methane or ammonia or fluorine. Perhaps it has no atmosphere at all, being a barren ball of rock like Pluto. The type of atmosphere determines the kind of protective equipment characters will have to wear, too, so the GM should usually give this some thought beforehand. The majority of space opera, however, forgoes the necessity for space suits on foreign planets, instead assigning most planets an Earth-like atmosphere. As a visual medium, the reason for this is simple — so that the characters are easily seen and their faces are not obstructed by a space helmet. Thus, in emulating the genre, it is entirely acceptable to continue this tradition.

HYDROGRAPHICS

Does the planet have any water, even in the form of polar icecaps? This is an important question, since worlds without water are unlikely to support life as science understands it. Now, this does not mean much in a space opera game, but it is another data point for GMs looking for clues as to the nature of a world and its life forms.

TEMPERATURE AND CLIMATE

This is a function of atmosphere and hydrographics to some degree. Worlds with thin atmospheres are likely to be cold, while those with heavy atmospheres are likely to be warm. Temperature is one of the factors that determine general climate as well. Admittedly, it is not the only one and oddities like cold deserts are certainly possible. As with atmosphere, worlds with extremes of temperature or climate require technological assistance to survive.

TERRAIN

There is no reason to assume exotic worlds would have fewer terrain features than Earth. In space opera, however, worlds generally have only one of two noteworthy features that define it. Thus, Lapir III is a jungle planet, while Poseidon is a water world. The GM should consider the number of worlds that he or she will use in his game. If it is many, it is usually best to keep terrain simple and uniform — no more than one or two to a world. If there are only a handful of worlds in the game, then there is more room for variety, with planets coming closer to the diversity of Earth.

SETTLEMENTS AND POPULATION

Is the world inhabited? Are these inhabitants natives or colonists? If natives, what are they like? If colonists, where did they come from and how long have they been here? Obviously, recent colonies will have smaller populations than older ones, but there may be explanations for anomalies. Perhaps the colonists of Lambda Serpenti VI using cloning technology to boost their population artificially high, while the colonists of Geronto use an immortality serum to extend their lifespan for centuries, thereby keeping their numbers low despite the age of their settlement.

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Naturally, there are many other elements that could be added to a world design checklist, but most of them are sub-sets of the above. If the GM takes the time to think about a few of these elements at least, he or she will find the worlds of the setting are more than one-dimensional backdrops. Space opera may paint with broad strokes, but that is no reason not to use more than one colour!

EXOTIC LIFEFORMS

Just as important as exotic worlds are the exotic creatures that inhabit them. From the beginning, space opera has been filled with all manner of aliens and extraterrestrial creatures — some good, some evil, all bizarre. Actually, the latter is not completely true. Space opera aliens and creatures are not always bizarre. Many are little more than guys in suits or Earth animals transplanted to another environment and painted a different colour. Depending the type of space opera the GM wishes to use, having a white gorilla with a horn on top of its head or a humanoid alien with a giant brain may be perfectly acceptable. Like so many space opera elements, the issue is not always one of scientific plausibility but of dramatic necessity. What role does the alien or creature play in the game? If that role does not require a lot of details or explanations, there is no reason not to go with the familiar and dress it up in space opera trappings rather than creating a completely plausible and scientifically accurate lifeform.

Of course, space opera games sometimes need to know these little details. Games based around exploration or research, for example, place a premium on the acquisition of knowledge. When the Star League Xenology Corps sends a landing party down to Xi Ursae Majoris IV, they may well want to come to grips with the ecology of the planet and how the enormous Predator Mantis fits into it. This is a setting consideration rather than a directive. Many space opera games will not require the GM to create — let alone understand — the mating habits of the Malusian weasel-fish to advance their plots, while some will. For the benefit of GMs looking to add alien lifeforms into his or her game (whatever its focus), here are some points to consider.

PHYSICAL FORM

Broadly speaking, space opera alien creatures come in two varieties of form: humanoid and non-humanoid. Humanoid aliens are by far the more common, at least when it comes to sentient ones. These aliens look very much like human beings with a few minor — and occasionally major — alterations to their appearance. Perhaps their skin colour is different. Perhaps they have pointed ears or are completely bald. Sometimes humanoid aliens have certain animalistic characteristics, such as a tail or sharp teeth. Humanoid aliens are the epitome of the guys in suits approach to aliens that is a hallmark of the genre.

Most of the time, space opera stories make no attempt to justify why aliens from another world should look like humanity. It is simply a fact and everyone accepts it in the interests of getting on with telling a rousing story of galactic heroism. This is very much in

keeping with both literary and anime space opera, so the GM should never feel embarrassed about adopting this approach. If he or she wishes to provide another explanation, there are several possibilities. One might be that form follows function, evolutionarily speaking. The humanoid form is not unique to humanity but is a reflection of our evolutionary niche on Earth. Other races on other worlds with the same niche therefore would look similar. Another explanation might be that an ancient race of Progenitors toyed with the genetics of hundreds of races, according to some inscrutable plan. Alternately, the Progenitors might have seeded their DNA on myriad worlds so that they would have descendants when their race at last died out. The many humanoid species are thus the children of these ancient astronauts.

Non-humanoid aliens can be intelligent or not. Intelligent aliens of this sort tend to be rare, since it is difficult to relate to a sentient puddle of goo or a silicon-based rock creature. On the other hand, role-playing games do not have to operate under the same limits as movies or television. Like anime, they can present all sorts of bizarre alien beings, because their imagination is not constrained by make-up and special effects technology. If the GM wants the Aldemarans to be beings of living energy, he or she can. The only limit is one of imagination. Most non-humanoid aliens are unintelligent creatures on the level of animals. In space opera, they tend to look a lot like terrestrial animals with a few details changed, such as the number of limbs or eyes or the coloration of the body. Again, role-playing games need not be as limited as movies or television programmes.



INTELLIGENCE

As with their physical forms, alien lifeforms come in two varieties of intelligence: sentient and non-sentient. Sentient aliens are what one would normally think of as aliens. They are intelligent beings who are, in many respects, more or less like human beings. More or less is the important phrase here, since space opera aliens are typically defined in relation to the human norm. Few are truly alien in the sense of being incomprehensible. There are two primary reasons for this, both of which are important to consider in a space opera game. The first is that it is very difficult to imagine the mindset of an utterly alien being. At best, one can create psychological oddities or intellectual quirks in order to approximate truly alien thought. Perhaps the Dounia race is asexual and therefore does not understand species that have two genders, so they frequently misuse personal pronouns. Perhaps the Altairians have such short lifespans that they adopt a seize the day mentality that borders on suicidal impetuosity.

In both of the above examples, the psychologies of the sentient aliens are constructed by adding or subtracting elements from human psychology and extrapolating from there. While probably not the most realistic approach, it is the simplest way to create the appearance of genuinely alien thought without going to absurd lengths. This segues nicely into the second reason for using this method: ease of play. In general, space opera is not about plumbing the depths of the alien mind. It is a very action-oriented genre. Aliens are, in many ways, props or colour for the setting. They are a convenient way to show that there are worlds beyond Earth with races and societies of their own. Furthermore, it is a lot easier on the GM and the players if they can communicate meaningfully with the Zhaaniss insect-men who are the deadly enemies of the Outworld Coalition. This might not be realistic, but it is more fun — and truer to the source material of the genre.

Non-sentient aliens are little more than animals. Space opera is filled with all manner of alien animals. They are regular obstacles to be overcome in space opera stories. Like sentient aliens, they are generally constructed on an analogy with Earth creatures. Therefore, the heroes of the Triplanetary Navy might encounter a Lapizian Cobra or a Darakkan Bear in their adventures. Such animals act very much like their Earth counterparts, even though (in principle anyway) they evolved on an entirely different world, hundreds of light years away. Space opera usually takes little heed of such concerns. What is important is not plausibility but dramatic necessity. If it is important that Captain Darius Venture find himself menaced by a giant lizard on Tau Ceti IV, then he will be, science notwithstanding.

Another possibility to consider beyond sentient and non-sentient aliens are those that exist in the grey area between the two categories. On Earth, for example, some people claim that dolphins and whales are sentient. Others make the same claims for chimpanzees and gorillas. According to conventional definitions of sentience, none of these species qualifies as truly intelligent, but their defenders would argue otherwise, claiming the criteria of such judgements is faulty. In a space opera setting, the question of the sentience of an alien creature could form the basis for dramatic conflict. Perhaps the Zenith Mining Corporation

is planning to destroy the Urquat Forest on Arcanis IX, in the process destroying the natural habitat of the Arcanian Lemur. The Galactic Friends of Life contend the Lemurs are intelligent beings and petition the High Council of the Republic to intervene. Without proof of their contention, though, the Council refuses their petition. Can the Friends of Life prove their case before the Lemurs' homes are destroyed forever? This kind of conflict is a staple of space opera and is very appropriate for certain kinds of dramatic games. Even so, the emphasis is on drama rather than scientific plausibility. Proving the Lemurs' sentence is not an exercise in cognitive science but good old-fashioned moral-driven storytelling.

EXOTIC ENVIRONMENTS

As noted in Chapter 1, space opera often plays fast and loose with scientific principles. This is done for a variety of reasons, most notably dramatic necessity. Sometimes, a story demands that science be thrown out the window in order to make it more exciting. This is nowhere more true than in the area of exotic environments. Many of the hazards of space travel — gravity, vacuum, acceleration — can get in the way of telling the epic stories on which space opera thrives. Of course, sometimes the exact opposite is the case and overcoming realistic interpretations of scientific principles can lead to great tales of heroism among the stars. Consequently, the sections below sometimes present two different versions of the following environmental conditions they discuss: realistic and space operatic. The GM should decide in advance which one he or she wishes to use based on the type of game being planned.

GRAVITY

Gravity is the natural force of attraction exerted by one body, usually a star or a planet, upon another body on its surface or in its orbit. Gravity is directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. Measured in Gs (pronounced gees), 1G is considered standard gravity. Alterations to gravity make objects heavier or lighter. Therefore, an object that weighs 1 pound under 1G will weigh 2 pounds under 2G. Gravity does not change the mass of objects, so it does not make a club, for example, more deadly in combat, even though its weight is increased. On the contrary, using melee weapons in gravity with which a character is unfamiliar can lead to dice roll penalties. Conversely, using a weapon on a gravity environment that is less than that with which the character is familiar can also be challenging as normal attempts to transfer weight result in throwing the character off balance.

For the purposes of *BESM Space Fantasy*, there are three different kinds of gravity beyond normal gravity. They are low gravity, high gravity, and zero gravity. Each is briefly discussed below.

LOW GRAVITY

Characters who operate in low gravity gain certain benefits, in addition to a decreased weight. The primary benefit comes in the form of increased movement. Freed from the

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effects of normal gravity, a character may be able to float or swim through the air. In addition, his or her jumping distance is increased, effectively giving the character Levels in Jumping. The GM is the arbiter of how many Levels the character gains, depending on how low the gravity is. As a general rule, the character should gain no more than two Levels of Jumping.

Characters who are unfamiliar with acting in low gravity suffer a +2 penalty to all Body Stat checks and Skill rolls where Body is the Relevant Stat.

HIGH GRAVITY

Characters who operate in high gravity incur certain penalties, in addition to an increased weight. The primary penalty is decreased movement. The additional body weight quickly fatigues the character and slows him or her down while doing even the most routine activities. The degree to which this affects the character is dependent on how high the gravity is and how unlike the character's native gravity it is, of course. If the gravity is high enough, characters with low Body Stats may be unable to support their own weight and will require the use of mechanical assistance, like an exo-skeleton or even a mecha. The GM may also decide that the character loses Energy Points at regular intervals to reflect the stress of operating in a high-G environment. As a guideline, the character should never lose more than 10 Energy Points per hour, unless the gravity is extreme.

Characters who are unfamiliar with acting in high gravity suffer a +4 penalty to all Body Stat checks and Skill rolls where Body is the Relevant Stat. In an extremely high gravity environment, the penalty may increase to +8 or even higher.

ZERO GRAVITY

For game purposes, zero gravity is simply an extreme form of low gravity and the guidelines mentioned under that header apply. The primary differences are that the regular laws of motion apply without restrictions. An object placed at rest — even in mid-air — will hang indefinitely without support until acted upon by another object. Likewise, a thrown object will continue to move in a straight line forever, until it encounters another object to stop or deflect it. Similarly, individuals can move objects far heavier than their strength would allow, albeit very slowly.

True zero gravity occurs only in space or on spaceships and space stations without artificial gravity of some kind. In space opera games, characters in zero-G can effectively fly through the air by pushing themselves off from solid objects. Unless the character is familiar with this environment, he or she suffers a +4 penalty to all Body Stat checks and Skill rolls where Body is the Relevant Stat.

VACUUM

Vacuum is an area of extremely low pressure, such as in outer space. This phenomenon is very common in space opera stories, where it frequently leads to the death of villains or

rampaging aliens after they have been jettisoned out an airlock. In and of itself, vacuum is not dangerous; it is the lack of air (or explosive decompression) that usually leads to death. In fact, characters who take appropriate precautions, such as hyperventilating and opening their mouths, can survive for brief periods in vacuum with few ill effects. Holding one's breath is a recipe for disaster, since the difference in pressure can rupture human lungs. A character with the Controlled Breathing skill is better equipped to handle this circumstance, as described in Chapter 2.

In more realistic space opera games, characters can survive unprotected in a vacuum for a number of rounds equal to their Body, after which they lose consciousness and will die in another number of rounds equal to half their Body. During this time, the character takes 2-10 points of damage per round, depending on the vacuum's strength. Artificially created vacuums might deal only 2 point per round, while the vacuum of space might deal 10 points, at the GM's discretion. Naturally, these effects can all be overcome if the character wears a Vacuum Suit or other protective gear.

In more realistic games, the character suffers all of the aforementioned effects, along with explosive decompression. Depending on the wishes of the GM, the character's blood may boil, eyeballs may freeze, and limbs may explode. If the GM is generous, he or she may wish to give the character a chance to avoid such effects through a Body (or possibly Soul) check, although probably at a hefty penalty (at least +3). In reality, decompression boils off the character's bodily fluids until it is a dehydrated husk utterly devoid of moisture. Characters who experience decompression and somehow survive (or are rescued) may experience permanent blindness or deafness, as well as brain damage.

EXTREME HEAT AND COLD

The human body can withstand various degrees of extreme heat or cold for short periods of time. Too great (or too long) an exposure results in damage. Extreme heat can tire out a character by sapping his or her reserve of Energy Points. For every 10° C above 35° C, the character suffers 1 point of Energy damage every 10 minutes. High humidity can increase this damage at the GM's discretion. Extreme cold works in a similar fashion. For every 10° C below 0° C, the character suffers 1 point of Body damage every 10 minutes. High winds can increase this damage, if the GM so desires. Of course, special protection can reduce or eliminate this damage entirely.

ACCELERATION

Most starships travel at extremely high speeds. These speeds are measured in Gs, just like gravitational fields. Unless inertial dampeners or other artificial gravity devices exist, the GM needs to consider the effects of acceleration. So long as a vehicle maintains a constant acceleration, its effects are no different than those of an equivalent gravitational field. Therefore, a ship with 6 G acceleration will affect its crew as if they were in a 6 G gravitational field. The danger from acceleration comes when it is not constant, but instead fluctuates. Sudden increases or decreases in acceleration can cause damage to those inside

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the vessel, if they have no means to protect themselves. Rules for the effects of acceleration and deceleration can be found in *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*.

RADIATION

Radiation is a stream of particles or electromagnetic waves emitted by the atoms and molecules of a radioactive substance as a result of nuclear decay. Prolonged exposure to radiation is harmful to most living things, including human beings. Without proper protection, radiation can kill or seriously injure a character. In a realistic setting, radiation exposure has very little immediate effect. Its long-term effects, such as radiation sickness, cancer, and death, can take months or years to develop. Unless the setting's medical technology is very advanced, such exposure is practically a death sentence for the character. It should be noted that nuclear weapons do most of their damage by means of the heat and shockwave they generate rather than through radiation damage. Of course, anyone who survives the blast will eventually suffer the effects of radiation sickness in time. In space opera, radiation can sometimes lead to rampant mutations. These mutations are often beneficial, giving the character psychic powers or incredible strength beyond his normal limits. While not realistic, this conception of radiation has a long pedigree of the genre. It is often used to explain the presence of horrific monsters with weird abilities, such as giant lizards or insects. In game terms, Radiation might inflict 5-40 points of damage every few hours. It may also interfere with radio communications and other starship systems.



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