

SAVE THE UNIVERSE

***a sci-fi adventure RPG
by Don Bisdorf***

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Chapter 1:

You're Our Only Hope

The forces of evil have claimed the galaxy.

The Enemy is powerful and relentless. Their forces are everywhere. Their strength grows with every passing day.

The Resistance is courageous, but outnumbered and desperate. One mistake or one lost battle might bring the Resistance to a tragic end, leaving no hope or refuge for the Enemy's victims.

But you can make a difference. You and your companions, despite your faults and your differences, can lead the Resistance to victory.

It won't be easy. The odds against you are formidable. You'll need all your wits, skill, and bravery to expose the Enemy's secrets, destroy the Enemy's weapons, and rally the Enemy's foes.

There's no time to hesitate. Get your blaster. Board your starship. Set your course.

Save the Universe.

What's This Game About?

Save the Universe is a roleplaying game about a group of brave heroes who fight alongside the Resistance to defeat an evil galactic Enemy. You'll invent the Enemy and the Resistance as you play, and you'll discover how your heroes struggle and grow over the course of the story.

A successful game of Save the Universe requires three things from your group: improvisation, collaboration, and drama.

Improvisation

You don't have to build a detailed map and history of your galaxy before you start the game. Instead, you'll build your universe as you play. Because you don't need complicated statistics for enemies, spacecraft, weapons, and worlds, it's easy to create exciting situations on the spur of the moment.

Collaboration

Save the Universe gives every player the opportunity to add color and detail to the game world. This means that no one has to take sole responsibility for building the universe, and everyone gets a chance to express their creativity and imagination.

Drama

Save the Universe isn't just about space battles. It's about your heroes struggling with their history, their fears, their failures, and their obligations. Your story will include star-crossed romances, personal revenge, deep secrets and difficult sacrifices.

How Do I Play This Game?

When you play Save the Universe, these are the things you'll be doing:

Create the galaxy. Your group works together to answer the galaxy questions, which provide a simple, quick framework for creating a science fiction adventure universe.

Create your heroes. Choose a role to represent the hero you'll portray during the game. Answer the questions attached to your role to create your hero.

Build your ship. As a group, answer a few questions about the ship the heroes will use to travel from mission to mission. Once you've created the galaxy, the heroes, and your ship, you're ready to play.

Tell the story. The player acting as the guide describes the situation the heroes are in and asks how the heroes will respond. The other players announce what their heroes will do, and the guide explains the consequences. The guide describes the new situation, and play continues.

Roll the dice. In certain circumstances, the guide may ask a player to roll dice to find out what happens. The player rolls two six-sided dice and uses the game's rules to determine whether each die passes or fails.

- ◆ If both dice passed, the attempt was a complete success, and the hero got what they wanted.
- ◆ If both dice failed, the attempt was a complete failure, and the situation gets worse.
- ◆ If one die passed and one failed, this is a mixed result. The hero got what they wanted, but something else has gone wrong.

Follow your destiny. A player can use the weight of their hero's destiny to:

- ◆ Change a failed action roll to a success.
- ◆ Add a useful fact to the story.
- ◆ Help a hero recover from their injuries.

When this happens, that hero can't use their destiny again until the hero attempts to resolve their personal pursuit.

Continue the saga. As the story progresses, you'll make note of what your heroes achieved, what they learned, and who they befriended. The guide keeps track of the galactic conflict and devises new missions for the heroes to attempt.

Chapter 2:

Preparing to Play

The first time you get together to play *Save the Universe*, you can expect to spend between one and two hours discussing the game, creating the galaxy, and creating your heroes. This might be enough for your first session, especially if you're playing with new friends and you want to spend time introducing yourselves.

If you have at least four hours set aside for your first session, you might spend half the session setting up the game, take a break, and then get back together for a quick mission in the second half.

Content, Tone, and Expectations

The members of your group may have different ideas about what kind of story they want to tell, or what sort of language and behavior is acceptable. If you discuss your preferences and boundaries up front, you can agree what belongs in your story and what to steer away from so everyone will have a good time.

You may want to discuss the following:

- ◆ **Language.** Will your heroes use foul language? Will they use made-up obscenities? Or will they avoid naughty words even in the direst situations?
- ◆ **Tone.** Are the heroes of this story idealists who regard every life as sacred and will always come to the aid of innocents in need? Or are they hardened cynics who are willing to sacrifice lives and principles to overthrow the Enemy? If your heroes will have differing moral standards, their conflicting viewpoints can provide drama in the story. But if you think tension between the heroes may lead to frustration or hurt feelings between the players, try to agree on a tone that will suit everyone.
- ◆ **Violence.** Since danger and battle are prominent elements of space adventure stories, it's important to know everyone's tolerance for the depiction of violence. Don't dwell on details about sprays of blood and broken bones if it makes other players uncomfortable.
- ◆ **Sex.** Heroes may fall in and out of love throughout your story, but you should avoid describing acts of physical intimacy that your group would rather move off-stage.

- ◆ **Elements to avoid.** The Enemy you fight in Save the Universe will be cruel and oppressive, but some players will prefer not to play out certain forms of injustice, such as racism, slavery, gender bias, or torture. If you want to deliberately explore a specific type of injustice, be sure everyone in the group is comfortable with the idea and be sure you can discuss the topic sensitively.

If you're presenting a game of Save the Universe at a convention, where time is limited, you could simply tell your players up front what the tone of your game will be and what it's likely to include or exclude, and then give players the opportunity to suggest changes or to back out if your game isn't for them. Check with your convention organizers to see if they have suggestions or requirements for managing content and tone.

Many clever designers have developed tools to help you plan the content of your game so that it's comfortable for everyone. These tools are especially useful when you're playing with a new group and you're not familiar with everyone's preferences. If you haven't used tools like this before, you can get started by searching the internet for the following:

- ◆ Brie Sheldon's Script Change system (<http://www.briecs.com/p/script-change-rpg-tool.html>).
- ◆ John Stavropoulos's X-Card (<http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>).
- ◆ Ron Edwards's Lines and Veils, first presented in *Sex & Sorcery* (2003), available in *Sorcerer: Sword, Soul, and Sex*.

Guide and Players

Before you start, you must choose one member of your group to be your guide. The other members of your group will be players.

As a Player

When you're a player, you portray a hero in the game's story. You decide how your hero works with the rest of your team to react to the situations the guide describes.

Your responsibilities are:

- ◆ Choose a role and create a hero.
- ◆ Decide what your hero's history looks like and decide what pursuit they're struggling with.
- ◆ During play, decide what your hero would do in any given situation.

- ◆ Decide when to use the destiny rules to give your hero an advantage.
- ◆ Add important accomplishments to your hero's history at the end of each session.

When you're deciding how your hero will act during the game, consider the following:

- ◆ How will your hero support the Resistance and defy the Enemy?
- ◆ How does your hero's style and history affect their behavior?
- ◆ Will your hero's pursuit affect their decisions?
- ◆ What will make the game more fun for everyone?

Also consider or discuss the following when you have time:

- ◆ Where do you want your hero's pursuit to lead? How will their pursuit change them?
- ◆ How will your hero's relationships to the other heroes evolve throughout the story?

As the Guide

When you're the guide, you present the players with the challenges their heroes overcome. You describe the worlds, allies, and foes the heroes encounter, and you decide how the galaxy responds when the heroes take action.

Your responsibilities are:

- ◆ Understand the galaxy you and your players built and keep track of how it changes as you play.
- ◆ Present the heroes with situations, obstacles, and challenges.
- ◆ Decide how supporting characters will react to the heroes.
- ◆ Decide how the Enemy will react to the Resistance.
- ◆ Decide when a player must roll dice to resolve an action, and which action is appropriate based on what the player tells you their hero is doing.
- ◆ Choose the accomplishments and setbacks that result from an action.
- ◆ Approve or adjust facts the players add to the setting of the game.

As you portray the world and the setting, follow these principles:

- ◆ Confront the heroes with challenging situations, so that victory is never certain, and peril is always close at hand.
- ◆ Give the heroes the opportunity to demonstrate that they're strong, talented, remarkable people.
- ◆ Make the galaxy a fun and interesting place.
- ◆ Help everyone in the group enjoy the game.

Chapter 3:

The Galaxy

When you start a new game of Save the Universe, your group will work together to decide what sort of Enemy you'll be fighting, and what resources the Resistance can provide you.

Start by declaring if you want something specific to appear in your game, like space vampires, or giant fighting robots, or plucky kids outwitting grown-up foes. Agreeing on these must-have items ahead of time will help you make decisions while you're building your galaxy.

Then answer the galaxy questions that start on page 10. The guide will ask each player, in turn, to provide one answer to this list of questions. When a question requires multiple answers, choose a different player to supply each of those answers. Keep taking turns until you've answered all the questions.

For the questions that have multiple choices, each choice has a detail the player must fill in. For instance, if you're deciding what assets the Enemy uses to enforce its power, and a player chooses "An elite corps of fearsome warriors," that same player must also decide how people recognize those fearsome warriors. Do they wear frightening masks? Do they carry distinctive weapons? You'll eventually need to know more about your galaxy than just these superficial details, but these facts should give you enough information to start playing. The guide will invent more information as necessary as the story continues.

If a player provides an answer that appears to contradict a prior answer, that player must either change their answer or keep their answer and explain how the two facts make sense together. Reconciling two seemingly contradictory facts can provide interesting information about your universe.

Player: I think one of the Resistance's assets is a utopian world beyond the Enemy's reach.

Another Player: But we already decided that the Enemy has control over interstellar travel. How does anyone get to that utopia?

Player: Good question. I think you get to the utopia through a secret wormhole that only the Resistance knows how to find.

When it's your turn to answer a question, you make the final decision about how to answer that question. If it's *not* your turn, don't try to erase someone else's idea. Don't say, "I have a better idea." Offer information to build on what the other players are saying, but don't take away their creativity.

If you're the guide, your role is to lead the players through the galaxy questions and record their answers. You don't give answers yourself, though you may suggest options if a player is stuck and needs inspiration.

Everyone, including the guide, has the right to veto an answer that would make the game uncomfortable for them. The player who provided the vetoed answer must either modify the answer to make it mutually acceptable or must choose a different answer.

Your Galaxy

What **assets** does the Enemy use to enforce its power? Choose three.

1. Mass incarceration or forced labor. [Name a world notorious for this.]
2. Colossal battle stations and warships. [Name the biggest.]
3. Strange technological or mystical powers. [What mysterious name identifies these?]
4. An elite corps of fearsome warriors. [How do you recognize them?]
5. Constraints over interstellar travel. [How do they enforce this?]
6. The threat of another enemy or catastrophe. [What's the threat?]
7. Subversion of a popular faith. [Name the faith.]
8. Economic control and dominance. [Name the economy's most crucial resource.]
9. Ubiquitous surveillance and secret police. [What's the slang term for the secret police?]
10. Manipulation of truth, facts, and public opinion. [Name one important lie.]
11. Feuding among lesser powers. [Name a world these powers are squabbling over.]
12. Public apathy, ignorance, or despair. [What influence keeps people out of the fight?]

What **leaders** control the Enemy's power? Choose one option, and then name them.

1. A charismatic dictator. [What's their best-loved slogan?]
2. A terrifying despot. [What's their favorite act of cruelty?]
3. A devious puppet master. [Who do they stand behind?]
4. Several independent rivals. [How many? Two? Four? Twelve? Only name one of them to start with.]
5. A secret cabal. [What symbol, mask, or communication method do their underlings recognize them by?]
6. A hostile and unfathomable intelligence. [Where did it come from? A lab? Another galaxy?]

What do the Enemy's common **footsoldiers** look like? Choose one option.

1. Uniformed soldiers. [What's striking about their uniforms?]
2. Emotionless robots. [What phrase do they use most often?]
3. Savage creatures. [What terrifying noise do they make?]

What are the Enemy's most notable **misdeeds**? Choose three.

1. Strips inhabited worlds of a specific resource. [Water? Gold? Helium-3? Blood? Dreams? Other?]
2. Ignores suffering from corruption and chaos. [Name an exceptionally corrupt or lawless place.]
3. Indoctrinates the powerless or gullible into loyal service. [What incentive does the Enemy offer?]
4. Pursues morally questionable scientific developments. [What are they researching now?]
5. Encourages compliance through outrageous acts of cruelty. [Name a recent despicable act.]
6. Constructs colossal monuments to its own glory. [What are they building now?]

What **assets** does the Resistance have? Choose three.

1. An organized military force. [Name it, and one of their strongholds.]
2. Disorganized bands of outlaws and malcontents. [Name the most notorious band.]
3. A small enlightened utopia beyond the Enemy's reach. [Name it. What's one amazing thing there?]
4. A wise, inspiring leader. [Name them. What were they before joining the Resistance?]
5. A dispersed and secretive conspiracy. [Name them and one rumor of their origins or abilities.]
6. People of conscience within the Enemy's service. [Name one and decide what they do for the Resistance.]

Finally, what do we call the Enemy?

Other Methods

If your group would prefer not to spend time building a new galaxy together, try one of the following alternatives:

- ◆ Use one of the prepared settings from chapter 9. This may be a useful option if this is the first time your group is playing the game.
- ◆ Use the setting from a movie, book, game, or some other source. Answer the galaxy questions using details from the source you chose.
- ◆ Assign one member of your group the task of answering the galaxy questions on their own before you start your game. In many roleplaying games, the guide has the responsibility of preparing the setting, but there's no reason that someone else couldn't take on that work.

Chapter 4:

Heroes

Each player must create a hero they will portray during the game. It's important to collaborate with the other players when creating your hero to decide how your heroes are connected. Follow these steps:

Choose a role from the list beginning on page 15. No two players may choose the same role.

Name your hero. If you can't immediately come up with a name for your hero, it may help to write down the rest of your hero's information first, in case some of that information provides inspiration.

Choose your style. Choose one of the three styles listed for your role or come up with your own style. This doesn't affect the rules of the game, but it should affect how you tell the story. A Fallen Noble whose style is "lofty and proper" shouldn't behave the same as they would if their style was "droll pleasure-seeker."

Choose your look. Choose whether you look human, mostly human, totally alien, or robotic. Write down one or more details of your appearance if you don't look completely human, or if you do look human but you want to emphasize a feature of your appearance.

Gather your equipment. Make note of the equipment you have available, as listed for your role. The first time you use an item of equipment during the game, tell the group what it looks like. If you want your hero to have something that isn't listed, ask the guide. If you're the guide, you have final say over whether a hero can own additional equipment, and you should use the "Amazing Science" guidelines on page 56 when making this decision.

Note your preferred actions. Make note of the two preferred actions for your role. These will be important when you resolve actions, as described on page 30. You may switch one *and only one* of your preferred actions for a different action. Maybe your Mysterious Seer is a member of an order of warrior-monks and has Attack as a preferred action instead of Inspire. Or your Gifted Engineer might have grown up racing hoverbikes, giving them Maneuver as a preferred action instead of Reveal.

Note your expertise: Make note of the expertise listed for your role. Again, this will be important when you use the rules for resolving actions. If you chose the Mysterious Seer as your role, you must also decide what your strange powers are—see page 23 for more information about this.

Fill out your early history. Answer the early history questions for your role. Consider what you know about the galaxy when answering these questions. Ask the other players or the guide for assistance if you like.

Introduce your hero. When everyone has filled out their early history, each player should introduce their hero to the group by sharing the information you've assembled so far.

Fill out your relationship history. Now that you know what your cast of characters looks like, use your hero's relationship history to connect them to another hero. Ask that hero's player if they agree to the relationship. If they disagree, choose a different hero.

Choose a pursuit: Choose one of the three pursuits listed for your hero, and answer the question attached to it. When you choose the hero the pursuit relates to, ask that hero's player if they agree to the connection. If they disagree, choose a different hero or a different pursuit.

Other details: If you like, you can write down other interesting details about your hero. Do they only speak in beeps or growls? Do they always refer to themselves in the third person? Do they sing arias during starfighter dogfights? It's not mandatory to invent these details before you start playing. You can add them to your character as they occur to you during the game.

The Roles

The Sly Scoundrel

Your style options:

- ◆ Respectably fashionable.
- ◆ Slick and glossy.
- ◆ Sketchy and dangerous.

Your equipment: a concealable weapon, a communicator, and a set of false identification.

Your preferred actions are Outwit and Maneuver.

Your expertise is theft, smuggling, grifting, and organized crime.

Early History:

- ◆ What's your preferred crime?
- ◆ What aspect of the galactic conflict did you learn to exploit?

Relationship History:

- ◆ Which hero helped you in the past, despite their better judgment?

Pursuits:

- ◆ You owe someone a large debt. Who is it, and which hero can help you repay it?
- ◆ Another hero wants you to take on a responsibility. What is it?
- ◆ You're developing an inconvenient emotional connection to another hero. Who is it?

The Veteran Warrior

Your style options:

- ◆ Monstrous and intimidating.
- ◆ Stocky and surly.
- ◆ Small but savage.

Your equipment: a powerful weapon, a communicator, and a bandolier of explosives.

Your preferred actions are Attack and Maneuver.

Your expertise is the tools and tactics of war.

Early History:

- ◆ What military force did you once fight alongside?
- ◆ What did the Enemy take from you?

Relationship History:

- ◆ Which hero do you owe a life debt to?

Pursuits:

- ◆ You don't understand why you're fascinated by another hero. Who is it?
- ◆ You want revenge against someone. Who, and which hero can help you?
- ◆ You're looking for a peaceful occupation you can devote your life to. Which hero can help you?

The Mysterious Seer

Your style options:

- ◆ Easily overlooked.
- ◆ Older and wiser.
- ◆ Ethereal and mysterious.

Your equipment: a strange ancient weapon, a communicator, and a tome of wisdom and lore.

Your preferred actions are Inspire and Reveal.

Your expertise is your strange powers, which you must use wisely.

Early History:

- ◆ Why did you nearly lose your way?
- ◆ How did your abilities make you a target for the Enemy?

Relationship History:

- ◆ You once appeared mysteriously to help another hero. Who was it?

Pursuits:

- ◆ Another hero believes that your abilities come with a troublesome secret. Who is it?
- ◆ You must stop someone who uses their powers for evil. Which hero can help?
- ◆ Another hero believes you have a flaw that's becoming dangerous. Who, and what's the flaw?

The Courageous Outsider

Your style options:

- ◆ Backwater peasant.
- ◆ Relic of a vanished culture.
- ◆ Honorable questing warrior.

Your equipment: a low-tech weapon from home, a communicator, and a precious memento.

Your preferred actions are Inspire and Maneuver.

Your expertise is rushing into overwhelming danger.

Early History:

- ◆ What isolates your home from galactic events?
- ◆ What took you away from your home?

Relationship History:

- ◆ Which hero was the first friend you made after leaving home?

Pursuits:

- ◆ You believe another hero is capable of a daunting achievement. Who, and what?
- ◆ You believe you can turn a villain away from evil. Which hero warns you otherwise?
- ◆ Which hero can help you return home? What must you do first?

The Fallen Noble

Your style options:

- ◆ Lofty and proper.
- ◆ Droll pleasure-seeker.
- ◆ Young idealistic scion.

Your equipment: an artful and decorative weapon, a communicator, and a pocketful of wealth.

Your preferred actions are Inspire and Outwit.

Your expertise is your family's history, knowledge, and resources.

Early History:

- ◆ What noble rank and role did you once hold?
- ◆ What disaster cost you your position?

Relationship History:

- ◆ Which hero had a dispute with your family?

Pursuits:

- ◆ You want to prove to another hero that you've abandoned your past behavior. What was it?
- ◆ You want to return to your former position. Which hero disagrees?
- ◆ Someday, you intend to face an old rival. Which hero can give you the strength you need?

The Reformed Defector

Your style options:

- ◆ Aloof and precise.
- ◆ Morose and haunted.
- ◆ Vengeful and righteous.

Your equipment: a common weapon of the Enemy, a communicator, and a uniform or other identifying symbol of the Enemy.

Your preferred actions are Adjust and Outwit.

Your expertise is the Enemy's secrets.

Early History:

- ◆ What position did you hold in the Enemy's service?
- ◆ Why did you serve the Enemy?

Relationship History:

- ◆ Which hero helped you escape from the Enemy, and how?

Pursuits:

- ◆ You must prove that you didn't participate in an Enemy atrocity. Which hero thinks you're guilty?
- ◆ When you escaped, who did you leave behind? Which hero can help you rescue them?
- ◆ The Enemy once harmed one of the other heroes. Who, and how can you make amends?

The Gifted Engineer

Your style options:

- ◆ Oil-stained and uncouth.
- ◆ Overconfident prodigy.
- ◆ Eccentric academic.

Your equipment: a quirky handmade weapon, a communicator, and a sophisticated scientific scanner.

Your preferred actions are Adjust and Reveal.

Your expertise is science and technology.

Early History:

- ◆ How did you employ your technical genius before you joined the Resistance?
- ◆ What was your greatest creation?

Relationship History:

- ◆ Which hero suffered as the result of your obsession with science, and how?

Pursuits:

- ◆ Another hero is suffering from something your science can mend. Who is it?
- ◆ You must build a powerful tool to help the Resistance. Which hero can assist you?
- ◆ You must devise a way to destroy a tool of the Enemy. Which hero's experience might help?

The Relentless Hunter

Your style options:

- ◆ Battered and worn.
- ◆ Sharp and elegant.
- ◆ Hostile and battle-ready.

Your equipment: a long-range weapon, a communicator, and a gadget that provides short bursts of mobility, like a grapple gun or jet pack.

Your preferred actions are Attack and Reveal.

Your expertise is stealth and investigation.

Early History:

- ◆ What targets did you once hunt?
- ◆ Who was your best client?

Relationship History:

- ◆ Which hero once eluded you? Or did you let them escape?

Pursuits:

- ◆ An emotional situation is brewing between you and another hero. Who is it?
- ◆ What target must you hunt down? Which hero could help you?
- ◆ A hero insists that you reconcile your dispute with a member of your family. Which hero? What's the dispute?

Strange Powers

If you've chosen to play a Mysterious Seer, you should answer these questions about your hero's strange powers:

- ◆ **What do your hero's powers look like?** Do they produce a glow of energy or an unusual sound? Does your hero need to perform arcane gestures or recite mantras?
- ◆ **What can your hero's powers accomplish?** Do they provide premonitions and uncanny hunches? Do they allow your hero to hurl lightning bolts and leap over mountains?
- ◆ **What would prevent your hero from using their powers or make them reluctant to use their powers?** Would the presence of daylight, or strong magnetic fields, or recently-shed blood interfere with their powers? Do they have a code of conduct that dictates how they must use their abilities? Does excessive use of their powers cause physical or mental consequences? Do those powers attract the attention of unstoppable malevolent entities?
- ◆ **What might happen if something goes wrong while your hero uses their powers?** Will they suffer psychic backlash or release hazardous bursts of energy? Or would they simply suffer the same consequences anyone else might encounter when attempting a risky endeavor?
- ◆ **How did your hero gain their powers?** Were they born with their powers, or did they learn their abilities? Are these abilities the product of a procedure or event, such as a cybernetic enhancement or a radiation accident?

Here are a few examples:

The Path of Fate: The Seer may meditate to receive visions of the future. These are brief and vague but can help the Seer to plan ahead. To see the future, the Seer requires a few moments of undisturbed tranquility, and uses the Reveal action. Setbacks resulting from this action mean that the Seer's luck will soon turn for the worse as the result of meddling with the natural flow of Fate.

Knights of the Amber Nebula: The Seer can manifest a sword and shield made of pure psychic energy. To retain the use of these tools, the Seer must adhere to the Knight's Oath, which binds them to defend the innocent, to speak the truth, and to act with humility. Setbacks may allow foes to avoid the slash of the

Seer's sword or shoot the Seer from behind before the Seer can bring their shield to bear.

Technomancy: The Seer can assemble scraps of Old Empire technology into miraculous devices. These devices rarely remain operational for more than a few days, and to construct a new device, a technomancer must have a supply of Old Empire parts. Setbacks might mean that the technomancer loses control of the peculiar intelligence built into the devices they're modifying, just as the Old Empire lost control of their grand, dangerous technology before the Collapse.

Since the Mysterious Seer's preferred actions are Inspire and Reveal, the Seer's powers will be more effective when used to produce information or influence people. If you want your Seer to excel in other tasks, such as combat or feats of agility, switch one of the Seer's preferred actions, as suggested in the instructions for creating a new hero at the start of this chapter.

If you're the guide, you may veto any ability that seems too powerful or sets the wrong tone. If a hero can destroy a battleship with a snap of their fingers, their battles against the Enemy will be anticlimactic, and there won't be much for the other heroes to do. If the Seer's powers include the ability to produce pastries out of thin air, this might be fun in a game with comedy elements, but it would be a poor fit in a game with a serious tone.

When you agree that a hero has access to certain abilities, remember that some villains may have abilities that are just as powerful, if not more so. Also, other characters in the universe may have entirely different strange powers. Your hero might gain their powers through rare mutations, while the Enemy might have sorcerers who practice an ancient form of ritual magic. If no one in your group is a Mysterious Seer, it's possible that supernatural powers are unheard of in your galaxy.

If an objective condition will interfere with the Seer's powers, the Seer can't rely on their expertise when attempting actions under that condition. For the example of the Path of Fate presented above, the Seer could not meditate and tell the future under chaotic conditions.

To avoid slowing down the first session of the game, you can start with a simple, general description of the Seer's powers. You can work out the details after the first session is done, when you have time to discuss.

Constructing Your Ship

After you've created your heroes, you'll build the spacecraft that your heroes use to travel the galaxy. Answer the ship questions on page 26, taking turns as you did when you answered questions about the Enemy and the Resistance.

The information about faster-than-light (FTL) technology and travel times will help you answer interstellar travel questions during the game, such as:

Do we have time to decipher those encrypted files before we get to the Dulcinea star system?

If we knew the route the Astral Flower starliner is taking, could we intercept it?

What would we have to do to blockade the Hudalig homeworld?

When you're answering the ship questions, don't reject answers that don't immediately make sense in combination with what you already know about the universe you're creating. Deciding why these answers don't conflict can provide interesting details. For instance, if you've decided that ships use jump drives to teleport from point to point, and you also decide that the shortest trip between worlds requires months, it's possible that the astrophysical calculations necessary for interstellar travel require months, using even the most state-of-the-art computers. Alternately, a teleporting ship might disappear for months in real time, existing only as waves of quantum energy, eventually re-materializing at its destination without its inhabitants noticing any passage of time whatsoever.

Your Ship

In this universe, ships achieve **faster-than-light (FTL) travel** through:

1. Warp drives (ships move rapidly through normal space)
2. Jump drives (ships teleport from point to point)
3. Hyperspace (ships move through extradimensional space)
4. Wormholes (ships travel through naturally occurring cosmic shortcuts)
5. Stargates (ships use artificial gateways)
6. No FTL (which may mean that the story takes place entirely on one world, or within one star system, or purely through interstellar communication)

What's the shortest **travel time** between two worlds in your game?

What's the longest travel time?

1. Instantaneous
2. Minutes
3. Hours
4. Days
5. Weeks
6. Months

How **big** is your ship?

1. Small. We each have our own individual single-person spacecraft.
2. Medium. Just big enough for the heroes to live in comfortably, with space available for cargo.
3. Large. Apart from the heroes, the ship has a dozen or so crew, and might carry a shuttlecraft.
4. Huge. Big enough to carry a crew of hundreds and an assortment of smaller craft.

Choose two **advantages** for your ship. These are exceptional qualities or equipment your ship possesses.

1. Speed and maneuverability
2. Stealth
3. Firepower
4. Concealed storage
5. Reputation
6. Powerful scanners
7. Communication interception and scrambling
8. Medical treatment and diagnosis
9. Science and engineering

Finally, the players should name their ship.

If your heroes travel in a large ship that serves as a home base and has its own crew, you can also design a separate shuttlecraft, scouting vessel, or starfighter that the heroes use when they're adventuring on their own. Choose this smaller ship's advantages separately.

If the heroes each have their own spacecraft, you can give all the ships the same advantages if they're similar or identical craft. If their ships are customized or distinct, you can give each ship its own advantages.

Chapter 5:

Rules of Play

When you're the guide, you present the players with a situation, and the players tell you how their heroes respond. You announce how the situation changes as the result of the decisions the players made, and you ask the players what their heroes will do next.

Most of the time, you use your knowledge of the galaxy and its people to explain what happens whenever the heroes attempt a task. If the heroes want to visit a planetary administrator who they suspect might be an Enemy spy, and you know that the administrator has already fled the planet, you'd tell the players that they find the administrator's office empty, and that there are signs she may have left in a hurry.

Sometimes, though, if there's risk or danger involved, you'll ask the players to roll dice to find out what happens. When you use the dice to resolve an action, you start by establishing a few details of what the heroes are attempting and what might go wrong, then roll the dice, and then announce what happens. The full details of each step of this process appear later in this chapter, but in summary, the process looks like this:

- ◆ Determine whether you need to roll dice, or whether you should just tell the players what happens.
- ◆ Choose which of six game actions most closely describes the task.
- ◆ Announce the possible results of success and failure.
- ◆ Explain the effects of the dice and let the player roll.
- ◆ Based on the result of the dice roll, announce what happens.

There's a lot to do here, but as you grow familiar with the capabilities of the heroes and the rules of the game, you'll learn to make these decisions quickly. In play, resolving an action might look like this:

Guide: You're trying to cheat at this card game so you can win your money back from that crime boss? All right, I think we can handle this with an Outwit action. If you succeed, you get your money back, and if you fail, the crime boss notices you cheating and sends her thugs to rough you up. And on a mixed result, you get your money back but you attract the attention of some thieves who want to separate you from your winnings. Since you're a Sly

Scoundrel, cheating at cards falls within your expertise, and Outwit is a preferred action for you, which means that only twos and ones will fail on your dice roll. Still want to try it? Okay, roll the dice...oops, that looks like a complete failure. The crime boss throws down her cards in anger and orders her bodyguards to grab you.

The rest of this chapter explains the process of resolving an action, in detail. The decisions described here are the guide's responsibility, and the guide has the final say.

To Roll or Not to Roll

You should only ask the players to roll dice to resolve an action if there's a chance for success as well as a chance for an interesting consequence of failure.

Chance of success: Declare whether there's a chance of success based on what you know about the situation and the approach the heroes are using. If the hero flies their starfighter close to the Enemy battleship to blast its sensor array, but you've already decided that the battleship is impenetrable to starfighter weapons, you'll just announce that the starfighter's laser blasts bounce off the battleship's armor, without rolling the dice.

Interesting consequence of failure: If the worst that could happen is that the heroes simply don't succeed, don't bother rolling. For example, if a hero is trying to climb over the wall surrounding an Enemy detention center, but nothing bad will happen if they don't make it on the first try, you can simply announce that they get over the wall, since there's no reason they can't keep trying until they get over. But if the wall is high enough that the hero might injure themselves by falling off of it, or if the hero might get caught by a patrol if they can't get over the wall quickly, this means there's a possible consequence of the hero's action, and it's appropriate to roll the dice.

If the hero is trying to achieve something impossible, but you believe a more modest goal is achievable, present the lesser achievement to the player and ask whether they'd like to proceed.

Player: I want to convince the salvage dealer to sell me that nice luxury star yacht in exchange for the positron crystal we stole from the Dominion.

Guide: The positron crystal isn't worth that much. If you're sufficiently charming, he might agree to sell you an old Confederacy courier ship. It's not as pretty as the yacht, but if you fix it up, it'll be just as fast. Do you still want to try to make the trade?

If the effects of the hero's action won't be apparent until later, you can delay resolving the action until then. For instance, if a hero attempts a Reveal action to tell an ally about their dueling opponent's weaknesses, you might choose not to resolve the Reveal action until the ally acts on that advice. This can provide dramatic tension by concealing the usefulness of the advice until the moment it's important.

The Six Actions

Once you've determined that there's a chance of success and that failure might bring an interesting consequence, choose which of the six actions below best describes the task the hero is attempting. If it's not obvious which action is most appropriate, ask the player to describe their hero's behavior and intentions in greater detail. If none of these actions seem appropriate, just decide what happens based on what you think makes the most sense in the circumstances, without rolling the dice.

ADJUST a technological device.

Use Adjust for tasks like repairing a starship's shields, or disabling a security system, or reprogramming a robot to disobey its directives.

If a hero tries to get information out of a computer, and the only obstacle is that the data is hard to find or difficult to understand, use the Reveal action instead. You would use Adjust to find the information if there's a technical obstacle preventing access to the data, such as security programming or encryption.

ATTACK with force or words.

The heroes Attack when they overcome opposition with violence or force. This can be emotional or verbal force as well as physical force. Use Attack when the heroes fire their starship's plasma cannons at an oncoming fighter squadron, or when they pry open the magna-lock manacles on their wrists with sheer strength, or when they shout a battle cry to break the morale of an enemy boarding party.

As with any action, apply the guidelines provided in "To Roll or Not to Roll" on page 29. If the target is impervious to the force the heroes use, this action doesn't apply. Also, if the target is defenseless and the heroes

aren't at risk, just narrate the expected results rather than resolving an action. For instance, if a hero uses an axe to break through a flimsy door, and there's no one around to stop them, there's no doubt that the hero will eventually get through the door.

INSPIRE courage, defiance, or loyalty.

Use Inspire when a hero states a firm belief or a sincere wish, or when they spark empathy and cooperation, or when they resist pressure that would silence them.

A successful Inspire action could force a foe to reconsider their position, while a failure could encourage the foe to fight harder and show no mercy. A successful Inspire action could allow the heroes to lead a band of frightened prisoners in revolt, while a failure could cause the prisoners to report the scheming heroes to the guards.

If the heroes intend to confuse or mislead someone, use the Outwit action instead.

If the heroes are more interested in intimidating their enemies than rallying their allies, use the Attack action.

MANEUVER with speed and agility.

The heroes Maneuver when they attempt a difficult physical feat, such as jumping over a wide chasm, or piloting a starfighter through a chaotic asteroid field, or sprinting to avoid a guard patrol.

If the heroes perform a clever trick that requires wits and tactics rather than speed, use the Outwit action instead.

OUTWIT with cunning or stealth.

Use Outwit when the heroes cause someone to make a mistake, to arrive at a false conclusion, or to overlook vital information. Use Outwit when the heroes lead an enemy into an ambush, or tell someone a convincing lie, or use distractions and clever positioning to slip past a guard patrol.

If the heroes use speed and agility to baffle their foes, rather than guile or strategy, use the Maneuver action instead.

REVEAL information or wisdom.

The heroes Reveal when they discover something interesting, or when they produce a useful fact from their background and experience, or when they provide advice to allies. They can use Reveal to find the clue

that leads them to the ambassador's murderer, or they can use *Reveal* to produce the cunning strategy that will lead the Alliance fleet to victory.

Use the *Reveal* action when the heroes produce information, not when they perform tasks. A hero could use *Reveal* to identify a problem with their starship's hyperdrive, but not to repair the fault. Instead, one hero could use *Reveal* to diagnose the problem and assist another hero who uses *Adjust* to repair the hyperdrive.

The Three Results

There are three possible results when you resolve an action:

- ◆ Complete success. The hero accomplished their goal with no setbacks.
- ◆ Mixed result. The hero accomplished their goal, but also encountered a setback.
- ◆ Complete failure. The hero did not accomplish their goal and encountered a setback instead.

As the guide, you'll announce what these three results will look like, and ask the player if they still want to attempt the action.

Accomplishments

Announce what the player will achieve if they're successful, based on how the player has described the hero's activity, and based on what you know about the situation and the obstacles.

If a player announces that the objective of their action is to help another hero with a later task, this is an **assisting action**. You'll need to know this later when the players roll the dice.

In most situations, a successful action should result in the hero achieving just what the hero intended. However, resolving an action might only yield partial progress toward the hero's goal if one of the following is true:

- ◆ The task requires prolonged effort and provides multiple opportunities for failure or undesired consequences. For example, if a hero is scaling a tall, treacherous mountain, you might judge that the player must resolve several actions to determine whether they encounter difficulty at several points during their long climb.
- ◆ The task will require contributions from several heroes, and you judge that all of them should resolve actions to determine the

consequences of their attempts. For example, if the heroes ambush a convoy of military hover-trucks, you might judge that all the heroes must resolve actions to determine how well they play out their individual roles in the ambush.

In these cases, you will represent the progress the heroes make toward their goal by drawing a progress clock, which is a circle divided into segments. You'll divide the circle into just a few segments for a simple task that requires only a few actions, or many segments for a more difficult or prolonged task. As the heroes accumulate success, you'll fill in segments of the clock, according to the rules on interpreting the dice on page 34. When the clock is full, the heroes reach their goal. The "Setting Clocks" section on page 50 gives more guidance on how to choose the right size for a clock.

Using clocks to measure progress is never mandatory. As the guide, you may decide that a task is not interesting enough to merit a clock and resolve it as a single action instead.

Setbacks

Now that you know what the hero might achieve, use your knowledge of the situation to announce possible setbacks. A setback is something that might go wrong as the result of the hero's action. There are four forms of setback:

- ◆ **Immediate setback.** A threat, obstacle, or undesirable consequence appears immediately.
- ◆ **Future setback.** This setback will lead to a new threat or obstacle in a future scene.
- ◆ **Injury.** An injury resulting from failure will reduce a hero's health level. See the health rules on page 35 for more information.
- ◆ **Mark a clock.** You can use a setback clock to represent a situation that's getting worse, or to track a limited resource such as time, ammunition, or fuel. This is similar to a progress clock, but you fill it in as setbacks occur, according to the rules for interpreting the dice on page 35. When the clock is full, an undesired event occurs. For example, if the heroes are searching the scene of a murder for clues, but they need to leave before the Imperial Police arrive, you might mark off segments on a clock to represent the time the heroes waste whenever their dice fail during actions. Filling the clock means the Imperial Police get there before the heroes leave the scene.

Remember that when the hero achieves a mixed result, they'll receive an accomplishment *and* a setback, and the setback should not cancel the accomplishment. For instance, if the hero is trying to sneak into the Enemy fortress undetected, a mixed result can't mean that they entered the fortress undetected *and* they set off the alarm, because an alarm would mean they were detected. A mixed result in this case might mean that they took so long getting into the fortress that someone stole the getaway vehicle they had waiting outside, or it might mean that they entered the wrong wing of the fortress and are now lost in its dark tunnels.

You'll find more guidance for choosing setbacks on page 48.

Rolling the Dice

Now that you've announced the possible results of the action, it's time to roll the dice. The player will roll two six-sided dice and look at the numbers that came up to determine whether each die passes or fails.

The rules below explain which numbers pass and which numbers fail. For each rule, you're not trying to exceed the listed number; you must match the listed number *exactly*.

Sixes always pass.

Fives pass if the action the hero is using is one of their preferred actions.

Fours pass if the hero's activity relies on their expertise. For example, if a Veteran Warrior attempts to identify the weaknesses of a Molybdenum-class battle cruiser, it would be correct to say that they're relying on their expertise, which is the tools and tactics of war.

Fours also pass if the hero relies on an advantage of the ship they're aboard. The players chose advantages for their own ship at the start of the game, as described on page 25. If the heroes are aboard a different vessel, the guide should announce whether that ship has any helpful advantages.

Threes pass if the hero's health level is Strong or Fair. Threes fail if the hero's health level is Shaken, Hurt, or Down. See page 35 for more information about health.

Twos pass if another hero successfully performs an assisting action to benefit the current action, as described on page 32. If you have already resolved the assisting action, and that action produced a complete

success or a mixed result, twos will pass when resolving the current action.

If a hero resolves an action and rolls a two, and no one has yet performed an assisting action, another hero can immediately try to assist if the players can describe how the assisting hero can cooperate in the nick of time. In this case, the hero who started the current action sets aside their dice for now. The assisting player then describes their hero's activity and resolves an appropriate action. If the assisting action produces a complete success or a mixed result, the assisted hero can evaluate their original dice roll knowing that their twos will pass.

Ones always fail.

Announce which numbers will succeed and which will fail before the player rolls the dice. If the player still wants to attempt the action, let them roll. The result of the action depends on which dice pass or fail.

If both dice pass, this is a **complete success**, and the hero receives their accomplishment.

- ◆ If you're using a progress clock, mark two ticks on the clock.

If one die passes and the other fails, this is a **mixed result**. The hero receives an accomplishment and a setback.

- ◆ If you're using a progress clock, mark one tick on the clock for the accomplishment.
- ◆ If you're using a setback clock, mark one tick on the clock for the setback.
- ◆ If the setback would injure a hero, reduce the hero's health by one level.

If both dice fail, this is a **complete failure**. The hero receives a setback.

- ◆ If you're using a setback clock, mark two ticks on the clock.
- ◆ If the setback would injure a hero, reduce the hero's health by two levels.

Always narrate the result. Don't just say "you succeed" or "mark off one health level." Explain what the result looks like in the story.

Health

As the heroes endure space battles and laser duels, they're likely to become winded, bruised, scorched, or broken. Too much punishment

might leave a hero temporarily helpless, but don't worry—they'll soon return to carry on the fight.

As described on page 33, you may reduce a hero's health level if they receive a setback from an action. A hero starts out Strong, and as their health gets worse, they become Fair, then Shaken, then Hurt, then Down. When a hero is Hurt or Down, dice that roll threes don't pass for their actions. When they're Down, they're incapacitated, unconscious, restrained, or otherwise debilitated, and they cannot affect the story.

Reduced health might indicate a physical injury such as a burn from a laser cannon, nausea from poisonous gas, or extreme fatigue from strenuous physical labor. It could also indicate a psychic injury, such as an agonizing headache resulting from a psionic energy pulse, or shock and confusion produced by a sonic blast, or a spiritual scar left by the claws of a spectral being.

As the guide, when you decide that the heroes are out of danger and have time to quietly rest and recover, you can allow the heroes to restore their health to Strong. This shouldn't take long. True heroes are ready to get back into the action as soon as they catch their breath, dust off their clothes, check the charge on their blasters, and come up with a new plan for getting out of whatever mess they're in.

Destiny

The heroes are destined to play a significant role in the struggle against the Enemy, and the players may use the force of that destiny to bend the odds in their favor. If a player can explain how either an event in their hero's history or an aspect of their pursuit might provide them with a benefit, they can use their destiny to achieve one of the following:

- ◆ Declare that an action resulted in a complete success, regardless of how the dice came up. The player may ask for this benefit this either before or after rolling the dice.
- ◆ Declare a fact, such as "There are notorious space pirates in this sector" or "That model of war robot tends to overheat in long combat engagements." If the guide or any of the other players believe that the suggested fact is particularly improbable or unbelievable, the player declaring the fact must find a mutually agreeable substitute. For instance, if the heroes are lost in a desert, it might strain credulity to declare that a fully-staffed café suddenly appears before them. It might be more appropriate to declare that the heroes come across a small oasis, or even the abandoned ruins of an ancient fortress.

- ◆ Restore one hero's health to Strong. This could be any hero in the group, including the hero who is using their destiny. This doesn't necessarily mean the hero's injuries are healed; it may simply mean that the injured hero now has the determination to ignore their pain and fight on.

In all cases, the benefit gained must relate to the pursuit or the historical event the player described, and the player must narrate how their hero's destiny helps them succeed.

Example 1: Assala the Gifted Engineer attempts an Adjust action to disable a stargate, but her player rolls a complete failure. The player consults Assala's history and says, "I'm using my destiny. I was one of the key engineers who designed the Galactic Stargate Network, and I remember our old diagnostic codes. I'll use one of those old codes to disable the stargate, and I'm converting that failure to a success."

Example 2: Nephtalie the Mysterious Seer falls in battle and her health drops to Down. Assala's pursuit states that she was once part of an organization that subjected Nephtalie to troubling scientific experiments. Assala's player says, "While the battle rages around us, I apologize to Nephtalie for everything that happened to her and for my part in it, and I beg for her forgiveness. I'm using my destiny and my heartfelt compassion to give Nephtalie new hope and restore her health to Strong."

A player using their pursuit to justify the use of destiny may refer to the implied events or motivations behind the pursuit when declaring how they turn failure into success. A player who uses their hero's history to justify the use of destiny may only refer to certain specific historical events:

- ◆ The events provided by the early history and relationship history questions attached to the hero's role.
- ◆ Events added at the end of each session of play, according to the rules on page 39.

To make it easier to connect their actions to their history, players may find it useful to bring elements of their history into the story before they need to roll dice.

Noni the Sly Scoundrel has the event "Helped the Seven Nebula Gang pull off a big score" written in her history. Later in the story, when she's tracking a notorious fugitive, she goes to the Seven

Nebula Gang for assistance, knowing that she can use her history with the gang to help her if she needs to use her destiny.

Pursuits

When a player uses their hero's destiny to influence the game, they cannot use their destiny again until their hero attempts to make progress toward resolving their pursuit. This attempt must either include a task that carries a chance of failure, or a request to another hero who has a reason to refuse. Play out the attempt, resolving actions as necessary, to determine whether the hero succeeds. Whether the hero succeeds or fails, the hero recovers their destiny and may use it again later.

Example 1: To resolve her pursuit, Noni the Sly Scoundrel needs money to pay off a debt. She decides to try to steal a shipment of valuable hyperium ore from the Enemy. The guide announces that an Enemy military escort guards the shipment, making this a risky heist. The other heroes agree to assist, and after they play out the heist, Noni recovers her destiny to use again later.

Example 2: Ulayu the Veteran Warrior wants to persuade the Nephtalie the Seer to help her get revenge against a rival. When the guide asks why Nephtalie might reject this request, the Seer's player declares that Nephtalie's philosophy favors forgiveness over revenge. The players narrate Ulayu's attempt to solicit Nephtalie's help, and afterwards, Ulayu recovers her destiny.

The amount of effort involved in the attempt doesn't matter. It could be something the heroes can resolve in a single action, or it could be an entire mission on its own.

There's no game benefit for completely resolving a pursuit, though it may make sense to declare a pursuit as resolved—either successfully or otherwise—based on the circumstances of the story. If a player believes they've resolved their pursuit, they can switch to a new pursuit, either arising from the circumstances of the prior pursuit or from a different source entirely. A player may also switch pursuits temporarily if the story blocks them from making progress toward their current pursuit, or if they're bored with their pursuit and want to try something else. When a hero switches to a new pursuit, they can choose one of the other pursuits listed for their role, or a pursuit from a different role, or an entirely new pursuit invented by the players or the guide.

A player may also choose to keep the same pursuit through the entire game, perhaps resolving it in the final session of the game, or leaving it open as a quest the hero will pursue indefinitely.

End of the Session

At the end of each session, every player may add a single item to their hero's history, based on the events that occurred during the session. For example, a player might write down that their hero "Freed the prisoners of Detention Facility Nine" or "Explored the lost city of Ithrell."

Adding events to a hero's history provides new experiences to justify the use of destiny. When players choose events to write down, they should choose events that might be useful in a later session. If the heroes liberate a planet from Enemy occupation, it's possible a native of that planet might help them in return. If a hero defeats a notorious warrior in single combat, they could rely on rumors of this victory to intimidate foes or attract allies. If a hero makes a scientific breakthrough, there may be ways to turn this knowledge against the Enemy.

This isn't mandatory. If a player believes their hero didn't learn or achieve anything worth noting during a session, they can skip this step.

Chapter 6:

The Saga

A game of Save the Universe is a story about defying the Enemy and restoring peace and freedom to the galaxy. It's a journey of sacrifice, courage, tragedy, redemption, and salvation. This story is your saga. After you've seen your heroes in action during the first session, the guide will prepare an outline of the saga to map out the goals your heroes must accomplish.

The Saga Outline

If you're the guide, it's your responsibility to prepare the saga outline, but you can get help from your players if you like. Start working on the saga after the first session, but it's not mandatory to finish the entire outline before the next session. Write up enough of the outline to provide the heroes with a few missions, and then work out the rest of the saga as you have time.

To prepare the outline, write down the Enemy's three significant assets, as determined by the group at the start of the game. For each asset, devise one or more objectives the Resistance must accomplish to eliminate that asset. If the Resistance eliminates all the Enemy's assets, the Enemy falls, and freedom and hope return to the galaxy.

For example, if one of the Enemy's assets was "Colossal battle stations and warships," the objectives necessary to eliminate this asset might be:

- ◆ Acquire secret intelligence about the vulnerabilities of the Enemy's warships.
- ◆ Destroy a manufacturing facility critical for support of the Enemy's fleets.
- ◆ Achieve a decisive victory over a prominent Enemy fleet.

The Resistance can accomplish an objective after they have completed one or more missions in support of that objective. To achieve the third objective in the list above—a victory over an Enemy fleet—the Resistance might need to complete these missions:

- ◆ Free a prisoner who understands how to decode the Enemy's military signals.
- ◆ Capture an Enemy signal transmitter and send false orders to Enemy fleets.

- ◆ During the Resistance ambush of Enemy forces, infiltrate and sabotage an Enemy battle station.

When devising these objectives and missions, you can work alone or can collaborate with the players. Some players will prefer to leave this planning in the hands of the guide, while other players may enjoy contributing to the story.

Don't plan out any mission in detail until you're ready to play that mission. As the state of the galaxy evolves during the game, the conditions surrounding a mission may change, or it may become necessary to discard a planned mission and replace it with another.

The heroes won't necessarily do all the work to accomplish any given objective. Other Resistance agents and allies can participate and may complete certain missions entirely on their own, if the guide decides it's appropriate.

Present missions to the heroes in whatever order makes the most sense to you. The events that occur in one mission might lead the heroes naturally to pursue another specific mission. Resistance setbacks might compel the heroes to delay pursuing a given mission, giving them the opportunity to pursue another mission instead. Or you might just decide that a certain mission sounds like fun this week.

Saga Size

You'll get the most out of Save the Universe if you spend several sessions exploring one saga, but you can adapt the game to the amount of time your group has.

Single Session

A single four-hour session gives you enough time to explain the rules, create the galaxy, the heroes, and their ship, and run a short mission. Don't bother filling out a saga outline for a one-session game.

In this situation, it's important for the guide to be familiar with the rules and to prepare to explain them succinctly and clearly. If everyone in your group has a copy of the rules, you can all study the rules before starting the game so that everyone is ready to play.

The guide may find it useful to prepare a few ideas for short missions ahead of time, and after the group has created the galaxy, the guide can choose one of those missions based on the details of the galaxy the players created.

If you prefer, your group could collaborate over email or some other medium to create the galaxy and heroes beforehand. This gives you time to run a longer mission when you get together to play, and it gives the guide more time to prepare a mission in advance. You may find, though, that it's easier and more fun to create your galaxy and heroes when you're all working together face-to-face.

During your short mission, throw in as many references to the galaxy questions as possible, so that the group's creativity doesn't go to waste. Toss the heroes into a perilous situation and give them the opportunity to deliver a significant blow to the Enemy. If you can manage it, add an element from a hero's pursuit to enhance the drama.

Short Series

If you decide to play a small number of sessions—somewhere from three to six—you'll use the first session to create the galaxy, the heroes, and their ship, and then play a short mission. Then the guide can prepare the saga outline and identify a few interesting missions to play. You can assume that the Resistance takes care of the other missions, or that the heroes accomplish some of these missions off-camera, in between the missions you've decided to play out as a group.

Decide what the climax of your short series will be. You could focus on a single Enemy asset and run a few of the missions dedicated to that asset, including the decisive mission where you neutralize that asset permanently. Or you could tell an abridged story of the entire struggle against the Enemy, in which case you might play at least one mission for each asset, leading to the Resistance's ultimate victory.

Another option is to spend several sessions telling the story of one long, complicated mission. You can use this method to emphasize the magnitude of the conflict against the Enemy, and the impact of that conflict in one corner of the galaxy.

Full Saga

If you're willing to play a dozen or so sessions, you can explore the full saga outline. Run missions, encounter setbacks, and fight off the Enemy when they counterattack. Dedicate scenes or entire missions to the pursuits of the heroes. Mourn when heroes die, and cheer when new heroes join the battle.

Generational Saga

If you've created a galaxy and a story that you'd like to return to even after you've defeated the Enemy, you can start a new story based on the

foundations of the old. Go through the galaxy questions again and make choices to show how the galaxy has evolved since the prior conflict. Your new heroes might be descendants or apprentices of the old heroes or might be entirely original characters.

As you play, find opportunities to rely on the lore you created during your prior saga. Return to the battlegrounds from the first conflict. Explore how the worlds of the galaxy have changed, for better or for worse. Bring back old villains, or villains who seek to carry on the work of their forebears.

Your new saga might even occur *before* your old saga. You could play a game based in the history of your original saga, to show the events that led up to the conflict your group portrayed.

The First Mission

As the guide, you won't be able to prepare much of the game's story prior to your first session, since you won't know what the Enemy, the Resistance, or the heroes look like. Just prepare a few rough ideas for a brief adventure you can lead the heroes through. Jot down notes in these categories for each possible mission:

- ◆ **The Situation:** Where are the heroes? What's happening? What is it they're supposed to be doing?
- ◆ **Obstacles:** Why are the heroes in danger? What's in their way? What's going to pursue the heroes every time they slow down?
- ◆ **Opportunities:** Where can the heroes find assistance or safety?
- ◆ **Surprises:** What might go unexpectedly wrong?

Leave details such as names and places vague. When you're playing the mission, fill in the details based on what you learned when your group answered the galaxy questions.

Open the story in the middle of a desperate situation where the heroes must act quickly. Don't sit around waiting for the good stuff to begin. Start throwing dice and vanquishing evil right away. Give the players an opportunity to learn how the dice work and how their heroes work together as a team. When you run into a question about the setting that no one has answered yet, invent a detail on the spot or ask a player to provide a suggestion. Let the picture of the galaxy develop as you play.

Further Missions

After the first mission of the game, the missions you prepare for the heroes should be in these four categories:

- ◆ **Strike at the Enemy:** These are the missions the heroes must undertake to accomplish critical Resistance goals, according to the saga outline.
- ◆ **Support the Resistance:** In these missions, the Enemy attempts to destroy or capture a Resistance asset, and the heroes must thwart the attempt.
- ◆ **Defend the galaxy:** In these missions, the heroes must prevent a tragedy caused directly by the Enemy or by the conditions the Enemy has created in the galaxy. Draw these from the Enemy misdeeds you identified when answering the galaxy questions.
- ◆ **Personal business:** These missions focus on the history and the pursuits of the heroes. Will the heroes confront the consequences of decisions they made in the past? Will their old friends or forgotten enemies make an appearance? Will their pursuits force them to make difficult choices?

Listen to your players when deciding which mission to attempt next. Are there any missions they're excited about? Have their pursuits reached a critical stage?

Prepare a mission by choosing the following details:

- ◆ **Opening Scene:** What danger are the heroes in when the mission begins? Where are they, and what are they trying to do?
- ◆ **Locations:** What world or worlds will the mission take place on? Will any cities, space stations, or starships be significant locations? What do these locations look like?
- ◆ **Characters:** Who are the most important characters the heroes will meet? What do those characters want? What are their capabilities?
- ◆ **Complications:** What problems will the heroes encounter? What can you introduce to keep things tense and exciting?
- ◆ **Assets:** What can the heroes use to their advantage? Can they find allies or tools? How is the opposition vulnerable?

Don't devise solutions for the problems the heroes will confront. Just write down the obstacles and give the players the freedom to surprise you with their solutions.

Successful Missions

When the Resistance achieves a goal, let the story show the effects of that victory. Who have the heroes helped? What enemies have the heroes made? Is the Enemy weaker now, or are they more determined?

When the Resistance destroys an Enemy asset, this is a moment of triumph. Give the heroes an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments. Show how the balance of power in the galaxy shifts. And then send the heroes back out into the fray again—the Enemy won't give up easily.

If the Resistance destroys all three of the Enemy's primary assets, the Enemy collapses, and the heroes have saved the universe! Discuss what happens in the galaxy now that the Enemy is gone, and what happens to the heroes. Give each hero an epilogue. And if you want to keep playing in the same galaxy, look at the guidelines in the "Generational Saga" section on page 42.

Failed Missions

It's not the guide's responsibility to make sure the heroes succeed in every mission. If luck or circumstances turn against the heroes, let the mission fail, but don't suggest that the heroes are incompetent or irresponsible. Play out the failure so that it's a demonstration of the power, cunning, and cruelty of the Enemy. Let the failure give the heroes a reason to hate the Enemy more than they already do.

If the failed mission was supposed to be a step toward destroying one of the Enemy's assets, replace that mission on the saga outline with a new mission. Give the heroes another chance to achieve victory, but don't forget about the consequences of the failed mission. Were any allies lost? Were any loyalties strained? Were any sacrifices made? Show the effects of that failure in later missions. Also give the players the opportunity to get their revenge. Bring back the villains that defeated them, or the battleship that thwarted them.

If the failed mission was in defense of a Resistance asset, show what happens when the Resistance loses that asset. Find ways to make this tragedy personal for the heroes.

If the Enemy destroys the Resistance's three primary assets, the Resistance dies, and the Enemy's control of the galaxy is secure. This doesn't necessarily mean the game is over. You can build a new Resistance and start again, as described in the "Generational Saga" section on page 42.

Changing Heroes

If a player wants to replace their hero during the game, they can choose a new role and fill it out as usual. If any other heroes had pursuits connecting them to the replaced hero, you may give those heroes new pursuits or rewrite their pursuits to establish different connections. You may wish to keep the replaced hero's information on hand in case anyone wants to play that hero again in the future.

If it seems appropriate based on the story, you may assign a new role to an existing hero. This might be appropriate if the hero receives new responsibilities or training. For instance, if a Charismatic Outsider joins a secretive spiritual order, they might become a Mysterious Seer. Or a Sly Scoundrel who discovers that they're the lost heir to an extinct aristocratic house may become a Fallen Noble. In this case, rewrite your hero with a mix of the elements from your old and new roles:

- ◆ You may keep your old style, equipment, and pursuit, though you may change any of these if you wish to other options from either your old or new role.
- ◆ Keep your old look, unless something in the story suggests your look should change.
- ◆ Keep your old history.
- ◆ You may take both preferred actions from your new role, or you may choose one preferred action from your new role and one from your old role.
- ◆ Switch to the expertise from your new role.

Although the guide should avoid killing heroes as the result of setbacks, any player may decide that it would be dramatically appropriate for their hero to die. If a hero dies as the result of a brave sacrifice, or gives a stirring speech before expiring, the guide should allow all surviving heroes to clear their destiny boxes. The player of the deceased hero may create a new hero whenever they're ready.

Chapter 7:

Advice for the Guide

When you're the guide, you're not telling your players a story. You and your players are telling a story together. But while the players are responsible for portraying their heroes, you're responsible for giving life to the rest of the galaxy. You have many decisions to make, and the advice in this chapter may help you.

Resolving Actions

As the guide, you have wide discretion to decide what's possible for the heroes to achieve, and what's impossible, and what might go wrong. You should strive to provide enough challenge to make the story exciting and tense, but not so many obstacles that the story becomes frustrating or pointless.

When deciding what the heroes can achieve, consider the following:

- ◆ What do you know about the galaxy? How tough is that war robot? How skillful is that Enemy pilot? How willingly would the people on this planet rebel against their overlords?
- ◆ What's the hero's look and style, and how would these be helpful or hindering? If a gambling house only permits robotic guests, it'll be difficult for a human hero to get inside. A Gifted Engineer whose style is "oil-stained and uncouth" will fit in easily with a crowd of rough-and-tumble mechanics, while a Reformed Defector who's "aloof and precise" won't.
- ◆ What equipment is the hero using? The Veteran Warrior's powerful weapon could damage a well-armored target, while the Relentless Hunter's long-range weapon could hit a target from a safe distance, and a Sly Scoundrel's concealable weapon might slip through an Enemy checkpoint.

Choosing the Right Action

Be consistent when announcing which game action is most appropriate for a given activity. If you decide that a certain tactic is an Outwit action now, don't tell the players it's an Inspire action when they try it again later.

When you're deciding which action is appropriate when a Mysterious Seer uses their powers, think about what the Seer hopes to accomplish.

If the Seer wants to create a telepathic illusion to distract a guard, that's probably an Outwit action. If the Seer uses their supernatural reflexes and their crystal staff to intercept laser blasts, that's probably Maneuver. In any case, fours pass on the Seer's dice only if their action relies on their strange powers. A Seer isn't relying on their expertise if they use ordinary tools and mechanical know-how to Adjust a neutron emitter, but they *are* relying on their expertise if they use their supernatural intuition to guide their repairs. The constraints you draw around the Seer's powers, as described on page 23, determine when the Seer can rely on their powers for help.

Choosing Setbacks

Some forms of setback will be more appropriate than others, given what's happening in the story.

Reducing a hero's health is easy and quick and may be the most appropriate setback when the hero's safety is at risk. However, there's no point in reducing someone's health if the heroes have an easy opportunity to rest and recover.

Creating a new, immediate problem adds tension, but can cause a scene to drag on too long if the heroes keep encountering new problems. Using the other forms of setback can help you bring a scene to an end.

If you decide that a complete failure or a mixed result will create a problem in the future, make a note of it and don't forget it. When that problem finally appears, remind the players that this is the result of a prior action that's coming back to haunt them.

Creating a setback clock lets you extend the tension of a task and portray the back and forth struggle between victory and defeat. But if you're using a setback clock, you must be prepared to maintain excitement throughout the task. If the scene becomes just a dull exercise in rolling dice and marking off ticks, it would have been better to resolve the task as a single action.

Try to mix up the forms of setback you use. Each form of setback provides a different form of drama, and your game will be more interesting if you don't use the same setback all the time.

Setbacks to Avoid

There are three consequences you should avoid announcing as the result of a setback:

- ◆ **Death.** Death as the result of a poor dice roll can provide an anticlimactic end to a hero's story. Find other consequences that will lead to more drama, not less. For instance, you might tell a player, "The explosion causes the tunnel to collapse. You survive, but your legs are trapped under the rubble, and the Enemy agent runs away. You know that if she reaches her ship, she'll escape with the plans for the new Resistance weapon. What do you do?" However, see the rules on "Changing Heroes" in chapter 46 for suggestions about how to introduce the death of a hero into the story.
- ◆ **Controlling a hero's decisions.** The heroes are always in charge of the decisions their heroes make. The guide cannot tell a player, "Your hero is terrified and runs away" or "The Enemy spy persuades your hero to turn over the secret plans." You can only describe the environment and the supporting characters, and then ask the players what they want to do next. For instance, instead of saying, "Soldiers charge into the room and force you to retreat," you could say, "Ten soldiers charge into the room, carrying enough firepower to blast you to atoms in a heartbeat. Do you want to run away or stand and fight?"
- ◆ **Nothing happens.** The rules on page 29 state that failure must produce an interesting consequence. If a hero is trying to deactivate the lock on a door and rolls a complete failure, don't just say, "The door doesn't open." Tell the player that they set off an alarm, or that a security robot spotted them. Or maybe the battleship's last escape pod flew away while the hero was wasting time fiddling with the lock, and now the hero must find another way to escape before the battleship crashes into the moon.

Removing death as an option doesn't mean that failure never has any lasting consequences. A mistake during a mission might not kill the heroes, but it might lead to the deaths of Resistance allies, or it might give the Enemy the opportunity to strike a decisive blow. Let both success and failure influence the course of the war against the Enemy to show that the stakes of each mission are far greater than the lives of the heroes.

Setting Clocks

Progress clocks provide a method for the guide to show that a task is difficult or time-consuming, but not impossible. When you force the heroes to resolve multiple actions to complete a task, you provide more opportunities for failure.

When you choose the size of a progress clock, assume that the most likely outcome of an action is a mixed result, which means the hero will make a single tick of progress but suffer a setback. Even in favorable circumstances—if a hero is using their preferred action, and they're relying on their expertise, and they're not badly injured—their chance of rolling at least one failing die is slightly better than 50/50.

If multiple heroes make efforts toward the same task and you want every hero to get a chance at an action, give the clock at least as many ticks as the number of heroes contributing. Adding more ticks beyond that will require the heroes to attempt more actions and suffer more setbacks.

Similarly, if you're creating a setback clock to track time remaining until a catastrophe, you can provide some pressure by giving the clock as many ticks as the number of actions you expect to resolve.

Example: You create a four-tick setback clock to represent the time remaining before a giant fortress collapses, and you ask your four heroes to each resolve an action to escape from the fortress in time. If three of them get a mixed result, the fourth will need a complete success so the clock doesn't run out. If just one of them gets a complete failure, two of the remaining three will need complete successes.

Combatants as Clocks

When the heroes get into a fight, you can make their opponents more formidable by representing the strength of the opponents with a progress clock. As the heroes successfully defeat and outmaneuver their foes, tick off the clock as usual. When the heroes roll failures, use setbacks to show how the opposing forces counterattack.

When you use a single clock to represent a group of foes, decide what one tick of progress represents. A single tick of progress might represent the heroes defeating multiple foes, if the opposition is weak and easy to blast through. Alternately, the heroes might need to accumulate two or three ticks of progress to defeat a single difficult

opponent. If a single opponent requires four or more ticks of progress to defeat, it may make more sense to give that foe their own clock.

Here are a few example foes and clocks:

- ◆ A squadron of starfighters: four-tick clock, one starfighter per tick.
- ◆ A small infantry unit: six-tick clock, two soldiers per tick.
- ◆ A professional bounty hunter: four-tick clock.
- ◆ A towering armored war robot: eight-tick clock.
- ◆ A heavy battle cruiser: twelve-tick clock.

To add tactical detail to a fight or to emphasize the strength of important foes, you can use multiple clocks to represent different elements of the opposition. You might give the lead assassin robot its own four-tick clock, while you assign a six-tick clock to the twelve robots under the leader's command. The heroes must now decide whether to focus their attention on taking down the leader or thinning out the ranks of weaker robots.

Remember the guidelines in the “Setting Clocks” section on page 50, and consider the significance of the fight within the story. Should this be a desperate, climactic battle? Use bigger clocks. Is this an incidental skirmish that you want to get through quickly to get to the more interesting parts of the mission? Use smaller clocks, or just resolve the fight with a single action.

Conflicts Between Heroes

The heroes all fight to support the Resistance, but their motives and methods differ, and sometimes the heroes may find themselves working at cross purposes.

If one hero interferes with another, you may allow the relevant players to decide amongst themselves what happens. If they'd prefer to leave the outcome up to the dice, you can allow one of the heroes to resolve an action, but only if the usual restrictions around an action apply. There must be a chance of success and an interesting consequence of failure, and the activity must involve one of the game's six actions. The interference provided by the other hero may help you choose setbacks.

You should only play out a conflict between heroes if everyone is having fun. If this sort of conflict will be frustrating or lead to hurt feelings among the players, discuss the situation out of character, and choose a path that avoids or remedies the conflict. Could the heroes grudgingly agree to work together for one more mission? Could you just narrate a

scene where the heroes have a blazing argument, settle it with a bout in the zero-gravity boxing ring, and become friends again? Does the dispute drive one hero to confess their secret fears, leading to greater understanding between allies?

If one hero attempts to influence the emotions or beliefs of another hero, the player of the affected hero may always reject the attempt. If the Courageous Outsider's player says, "I'm going to Inspire the Fallen Noble to defy her father," the Noble's player may say, "No, my hero wouldn't do that." As explained in "Setbacks to Avoid" on page 49, the players are always in charge of the decisions their heroes make.

Daring and Danger

A fight scene can be boring if it's just two groups of people shooting at each other for no reason. Add tension by introducing other problems the heroes must contend with or other goals the heroes must pursue. For example:

- ◆ Innocent bystanders are in danger, and the heroes must shield them from the battle.
- ◆ An important villain is trying to escape.
- ◆ The villains are trying to get past the heroes and attack an important target. Alternatively, the heroes are trying to get past the opposition to reach a goal.
- ◆ There's a time limit. Maybe the heroes are aboard a ship that's going to self-destruct, or the heroes must knock out an Enemy anti-aircraft gun before a vulnerable Resistance ship arrives.
- ◆ There's another danger besides violence from the opposition. Maybe there's a sandstorm, or an earthquake, or a fire. Maybe there's an enormous enraged creature in the middle of the battlefield, lashing out at both sides.

These additional problems will keep the heroes scrambling and will add variety to fight scenes. They also give the heroes something to worry about other than their own safety. The villain might get away. The Enemy anti-aircraft gun might destroy the Resistance supply transport.

Also, important foes should taunt, gloat, threaten, and bargain. Let the villains express their personality. Encourage the heroes to battle their foes with words and principles—to Attack opponents with insults and Inspire allies with brave speeches. Make the fight personal instead of just an exchange of laser blasts.

Keeping Things Moving

When you're the guide, it's your responsibility during a fast-paced, complicated scene to present the situation clearly and to make sure that all your players get a chance to participate.

Whenever you give a player a chance to act, do the following:

- ◆ Describe the situation the hero is in, and what threats they're facing. Describe who's in danger, and what's going to happen if the hero doesn't act.
- ◆ Ask the player what their hero is going to do.
- ◆ Roll dice to resolve an action, if necessary. Then describe what happens. Describe what the hero achieved, and how the situation changed.

You can try one of the following methods to help the heroes share the spotlight evenly:

- ◆ Let the players take turns by going around the table clockwise or counterclockwise. On each player's turn, present that player with the situation, and give them a chance to act. Then move to the next player.
- ◆ Start by choosing one player to take the first action. Whenever a player acts, that player chooses who acts next, but can't choose someone who acted already. Once everyone has acted, the last player to act chooses a player to begin a new round of actions.

Large and Small Groups

As the author, I believe *Save the Universe* works best with three to five players, but you can certainly play with more or fewer players, if you're willing to work through some potential obstacles.

If you have a small group, some of the six actions might not be anyone's preferred action. For instance, if you only have two players, and one is a Courageous Outsider while the other is a Fallen Noble, only the Inspire, Maneuver, and Outwit actions will be preferred for your heroes. They'll have a difficult time if their missions require them to Adjust, Attack, or Reveal. When this happens, you should plan missions that focus on the strengths of the heroes. Heroes who don't prefer the Attack or Maneuver actions should go on missions where they can avoid combat. Heroes who don't prefer the Inspire or Outwit actions should go on missions where they don't need to negotiate or bluff. This is important even if you have a large group and there's still one action that no one prefers.

Another hazard of a small group is that losing health levels can quickly bring the team to a halt. If you have five heroes and one hero falls, the other four heroes can pick up the slack. If you only have two heroes and one falls, the remaining hero must somehow survive on their own. When you guide a small group, you should adjust the strength of the opposition and the severity of setbacks if it looks like the group is in danger of failing too often to have fun.

If you're the guide for a large group, you may have trouble giving everyone something to do. Pause now and again during the game to consider whether any players have been left out of the action. If so, find a way to bring the overlooked players back into the story.

Down but Not Defeated

Don't be afraid to reduce a hero's health to Down. A hero who's Down isn't dead, and they'll only be Down until another hero uses their destiny to revive their comrade, or until enough time passes for the fallen hero to pull themselves back together.

And don't be reluctant to knock *all* the heroes out. If this happens, use this as an opportunity to put the heroes into another dramatic situation. Offer the players something to get excited about so they're not frustrated by their defeat. For instance, after the heroes fall, they might recover and find themselves...

...in a detention cell whose security systems aren't perfect. When the heroes escape, they're deep inside an Enemy fortress, and they're in a position to gather weapons, rescue prisoners, or maybe even dig up information critical to the Resistance.

...in the throne room of an Enemy warlord. The warlord is about to have them executed, but if the heroes are clever, they might convince the warlord to face them in a duel, or to reveal an Enemy secret, or even to join the Resistance.

...in a deathtrap set by the Enemy sorceress. When the heroes escape the deathtrap and return to thwart the sorceress' invasion plans in the nick of time, she may be furious enough to make a critical strategic error.

If the heroes fall too often, though, the players will start to feel like their heroes aren't heroic at all. Your favorite sci-fi movie characters do get captured sometimes, but not every time they go into battle. Pay attention to your players and only give them as much adversity as they enjoy.

Different Results for Different Heroes

Adjust your descriptions of accomplishments and setbacks to show off the individual strengths of the heroes. Let's say the heroes ambush a squad of infantry robots, and they all roll complete successes. You could describe their accomplishments like this:

Noni the Sly Scoundrel pops up unexpectedly from behind a cargo loader, quick-drawing her pistol and firing off three quick shots. Three infantry robots fall to the deck, smoking.

Ulayu the Veteran Warrior steps into the corridor, hoisting her heavy particle cannon to her hip with a bellow of defiance. One loud, bright blast from the cannon vaporizes three of the infantry robots.

Nephtalie the Mysterious Seer rolls into the midst of the robot squad, nimbly dodging the blasts from their rifles. Then she leaps to her feet and reaches out, hurling bolts of purple energy from her bare hands, tearing the robots into scrap.

Or let's say an enemy war robot fires an anti-personnel rocket at the heroes, and when they attempt Maneuver actions to avoid the explosion, they all roll complete failures. As the guide, you might tell them all to mark off two health levels, and you could demonstrate their talents for survival like this:

Noni dives for cover, but the explosion catches her and hurls her down the corridor. She survives, but her ears are ringing, her cloak is scorched, and she could really use a shot of Altarian brandy.

The rocket hits Ulayu square on the chest plate of her battle armor. There's a blinding light and a cloud of atomic plasma, and when the dust clears, Ulayu is still standing, though her armor is blackened and cracked, and might not withstand another hit.

Nephtalie crouches and gestures, summoning a sphere of purple energy around herself. The explosion shatters the sphere and knocks her flat, and though she survived the blast, the glow of power in her eyes has dimmed, and she knows she doesn't have much strength left.

Amazing Science

As you play, you'll need to decide what sort of technology your heroes have access to. Most often, their tools should be similar to our modern Earth gadgets, but cooler. Instead of guns, they have blasters. Instead of cars, they have hovercraft. Instead of cell phones, they have communicator bracelets.

When you're the guide, you have final say over whether a given technology exists, and what devices the heroes can get their hands on. If you want to add some truly miraculous technology, think about how such a device will affect your story. Consider the following questions:

What obstacles can the heroes bypass with this technology? If the heroes have teleportation belts, for instance, they can jump from place to place instantly. They can easily evade guard patrols, skip over hostile terrain, and ignore walls and barriers.

Is the technology risky to use? For example, would someone require precise mathematical calculations to teleport into the middle of a crowded, complicated structure? If so, the heroes might need to attempt an Adjust action if they're hopping into an Enemy fortress.

Does the Enemy also have this technology? If the heroes use their teleportation belts to board hostile starships, the Enemy might be able to do the same.

What constrains use of the technology? Will the teleportation belts not work in strong magnetic fields, or over distances longer than a hundred meters? Do their batteries require a full day to recharge? Does the Enemy know how to make anti-teleportation shields?

Don't hesitate to forbid any technology that would allow the heroes to accomplish missions without difficulty or danger. Heroes in *Save the Universe* will sometimes devise scientific solutions for their problems, but most of the time, they should rely on nothing but their courage and their blaster pistols.

Keeping Notes

Whether you're preparing game situations ahead of a session or you're making notes while you play, focus on the details that will help provide the heroes with opportunities and obstacles. If your notes are succinct, you can record information about worlds and characters on index cards, and then pull out the necessary cards later when a character returns or

the heroes revisit a world. The prompts below may help you focus your notes on the details you need to play.

Worlds

Name: What does everyone call this world?

Environment: What's the environment like in the area where the heroes will explore? Are there barren deserts? High mountains? Thick swamps? Frigid glaciers? Airless chasms? Is it a luxurious deep space colony, or a worn-out orbital habitat?

Population: How densely populated is this place? If one culture dominates the area, what are those people like?

Society: Is this a rigid police state, or does violence and anarchy reign? Are the people here prosperous, or starving? Do they have state-of-the-art galactic technology, or are they still learning the secrets of physics and chemistry?

Resources: What's valuable here? Why would anyone come here?

Hazards: What's dangerous here? What should the heroes worry about?

Enemy: What resources does the Enemy have here?

Resistance: Is there a Resistance presence, and if so, what does it look like?

Locations

Purpose: What was this location prepared for, or what do people use it for?

Appearance: What does this place look like, broadly speaking?

Surroundings: What's nearby?

Features: What will the heroes find here? If this is a building, what important rooms or facilities does it contain? If this is a city, what neighborhoods or structures are significant?

Characters

Name: What does everyone call this person? Do they have an important rank or title?

Style: How do they act and behave? How do they dress?

Look: Do they look human? What's distinctive about their appearance?

Occupation: What are they doing now? What's their position and responsibility?

Ambition: What do they want, and what are they willing to do to get it?

Strengths: What are they good at? What resources can they rely on?

Weaknesses: Where are they vulnerable? Who are their enemies?

Enemy Sentiment: How do they feel about the Enemy?

Resistance Sentiment: How do they feel about the Resistance?

Deciding What Happens Next

Let's say the heroes are on a frontier world, in a lawless port, searching for a fugitive scientist who knows the secret of the Enemy's doomsday weapon. The heroes have decided to bribe the local crime boss for information.

What happens next?

If you're the guide, that's what you must decide. Sometimes the dice will tell you which way the story will turn, but sometimes you have nothing to go on but your imagination. In general, the answer to the question "what happens next?" should be "whatever is fun and exciting," but when you need more to go on, the following principles may provide inspiration.

Use What You've Built

If you need to throw a new obstacle at the heroes, consider what you already know about their situation. It might not be necessary to add something new to the story if the story already has something you can use. For instance, if the heroes encounter a setback when attempting a Reveal action to find a path through the forest, and you've already decided that there are shapeshifting predators lurking in the forest, you could announce that the heroes have walked into an ambush set by the shapeshifters.

Rely on story details provided by the players whenever possible. Your players are helping you build the universe—reward them by putting their creations on stage. If a player uses their destiny to announce that there's an abandoned temple nearby, don't forget about it. Later, when the heroes are searching for an escaped criminal, maybe the fugitive was last seen near the temple. If the heroes need to rendezvous with a

clandestine contact, maybe the contact wants to meet them inside the temple.

Seek Inspiration from the Players

When you're the guide, you may allow players to contribute new facts to the world as you play by asking them questions about the situation their heroes are in.

What kind of deity do people worship on this planet?

There's a giant statue of an important historical figure in the middle of the city. What is that person famous for?

What sort of riding beasts do they sell at this outpost?

You may embellish the answer the players provide by adding "and..." or "but..." and giving more information.

Player: I think this riding outpost sells enormous winged serpents that can spit lightning bolts.

Guide: Sure! And they're called "stormriders." But they're difficult to handle, and they can be dangerous for untrained riders.

Ask questions like these if you're stumped for a detail, or if you think it would be fun to let the players add something to the world that you might not expect.

Spotlight the Heroes

The heroes are the most important characters of the story, and the story should be about them. When you're planning a new mission or when you're deciding what happens next during a mission, consider including events like these:

- ◆ Bring back a friend or foe from a hero's history.
- ◆ Travel to a world that a hero once visited and make their prior experience on that world significant.
- ◆ Show how rumors about the heroes earn them new allies or opponents.
- ◆ Present a challenge to a hero's pursuit.
- ◆ Let a hero's look or style suggest how someone responds to them.
- ◆ Provide an obstacle that gives a hero the chance to show off their expertise.

As the heroes battle the Enemy, show how the galaxy around them changes. Show the results of their triumphs and losses. As the heroes struggle with their pursuits, show how their efforts pay off or lead to disaster. Demonstrate that the heroes are significant forces in the galaxy and that their accomplishments matter.

Pick Up Loose Threads

Make note of the places the heroes visited, and what they found there. Remember who the heroes help, who they ignore, and who they insult. Note their victories and their failures, and the leads they didn't follow up on.

Bring those facts and situations back into the story later. Connect them. Create alliances and conspiracies. Bring back old foes and rivals. Explore legends and rumors.

Sample Setbacks

It's not always easy to identify an interesting setback for an action. The lists below provide some suggested setbacks for common circumstances.

For some of these events, it may be appropriate to reduce the health levels of the heroes. For other events, you may want to mark setback clocks to represent trouble approaching.

Personal Combat

- ◆ You get hurt.
- ◆ Your foes receive reinforcements.
- ◆ A dangerous foe decides to pursue and destroy you.
- ◆ Something you assumed about the opposition forces turns out to be wrong.
- ◆ You're separated from your allies.
- ◆ You cause collateral damage.
- ◆ You stumble into a hazard of the environment.
- ◆ Someone traps or restrains you.
- ◆ You're out of ammunition, or your weapon breaks.
- ◆ A target you must protect is now in danger.
- ◆ Someone you're chasing is escaping.
- ◆ A window of opportunity is about to expire.
- ◆ You obstruct an ally's maneuver.

Starship Combat

- ◆ An important component of your ship fails. Choose a component, or roll a die and consult the following:
 1. Sensors
 2. Weapons
 3. Communication
 4. Life Support
 5. Propulsion
 6. FTL Drive
- ◆ Someone inside your ship is injured.
- ◆ Important cargo is endangered.
- ◆ Someone plants a tracker or bomb or some other device on your ship without you noticing.
- ◆ Someone or something boards your ship.
- ◆ Due to a navigation error, you're not sure where you are.
- ◆ Any of the suggested personal combat setbacks.

Conversation

- ◆ From your behavior, the person you're talking to guesses something you're keeping secret.
- ◆ They slip a lie past you, or they don't tell you the whole truth.
- ◆ They unintentionally give you false or incomplete information.
- ◆ They pretend you've convinced them, but they plan to betray or expose you later.
- ◆ Someone overhears you, which causes problems.
- ◆ They try to help you, but just get themselves in trouble.
- ◆ They misunderstand you, leading to disaster.
- ◆ You make them angry or suspicious.
- ◆ They'll agree with you, but only if you give them more than you intended.
- ◆ The conversation distracted you from something important.
- ◆ You got too close to the wrong people, and their problems are about to become yours.
- ◆ They'll come to you later to demand an inconvenient favor.

Investigation

- ◆ You pick up an important clue, but it doesn't mean what you think it does.
- ◆ Your search exposes you to someone who means you harm.
- ◆ You stumble into an immediate threat.
- ◆ Without meaning to, you triggered something that's going to cause a problem.
- ◆ Your search was successful, but you broke or lost a necessary tool.
- ◆ You find what you wanted, but you miss something important.
- ◆ You're close to your goal but reaching it will cost you more than you expected.
- ◆ You inadvertently cause offense or break a rule.
- ◆ You learn something the hard way, and you're injured or fatigued.
- ◆ You found what you're looking for, but it's damaged, or incomplete, or untranslated, or encoded.
- ◆ Something else has gone wrong that you might have avoided if your search had been quicker.

Instant Aliens

If you need to know what a new character looks like and you're not feeling inspired, try the following random tables.

First, roll dice to determine the character's overall style and whether the character is basically human. If the character doesn't look human, roll on the "Not Human?" table to find out what about them reveals their alien nature.

STYLE	BASICALLY HUMAN?	NOT HUMAN?
1) Hulking		1) Humanoid with elemental feature
2) Diminutive	1) Yes	2) Elemental strange shape
3) Agile	2) Yes	3) Humanoid with animal feature
4) Predatory	3) Yes	4) Animal shape
5) Sedentary	4) No	5) Humanoid with mechanical feature
6) Delicate	5) No	6) Mechanical strange shape
	6) No	

If the character has a non-human feature, roll a die and check the "Feature" table below to see which feature it is. If the character has a strange shape, roll a die and check the "Strange Shape" table.

If the character's physical form incorporates an elemental feature, check the "Element" table. If the character has an animal shape or feature, use the "Animal" table. If you roll an option that doesn't make sense, roll again or choose an option you prefer.

FEATURE	STRANGE SHAPE	ELEMENT	ANIMAL
1) Eyes	1) Simple (Sphere, Cylinder, etc.)	1) Energy	1) Bird
2) Ears	2) Many-Limbed	2) Fluid	2) Reptile
3) Head or Face	3) Serpentine	3) Stone	3) Fish
4) Hands or Feet	4) Shifting and Amorphous	4) Metal	4) Beast
5) Limb(s)	5) Swarm of Things	5) Plant	5) Insect
6) Body or Skin	6) Within a Container, or Holographic	6) Gas	6) Worm

Chapter 8:

Sample Missions

To provide inspiration and to demonstrate what might occur in a game of Save the Universe, here are a few mission ideas. Fill in the details or adjust as necessary when you're using these in your own saga.

Short Missions

If you've created your Enemy and your heroes and you're not sure what to do next, you can use one of the following mission outlines to play a short mission. Start the story just as the heroes are plunging into danger. Let the dice and the decisions of the players direct the flow of the story. Let the heroes demonstrate their prowess, and let the Enemy demonstrate their cruelty. Move fast and blow stuff up. When you're done, use what you've learned about the heroes and the universe to continue the story.

As you're playing out these missions, you'll need to answer some questions and add details. The information your group assembled about the galaxy and the heroes may help. If not, the GM will need to fill in the blanks, or can ask the players to contribute.

Desperate Space Battle

The Situation: The heroes are aboard their ship, in the middle of a massive space battle between the Enemy and the Resistance. The Resistance is losing the fight because the Enemy flagship carries something—or someone—that tilts the balance in the Enemy's favor. If the heroes can board the Enemy flagship and neutralize the Enemy's advantage, the Resistance will win the battle. If the heroes fail, the Resistance will lose control of a key star system.

Obstacles: The heroes will need to get past Enemy vessels and defy the firepower of the Enemy's flagship. Then they must board the flagship, elude its crew, reach the target, and knock it out before the Resistance fleet falls.

Opportunities: The heroes can use the chaos of the battle to cover their approach to the flagship, and they can rely on Resistance forces for support. The Enemy flagship is enormous, and a few heroes might be able to move through it undetected where a larger force would draw attention.

Surprises: An Enemy ace pilot might intercept the heroes before they can reach the Enemy flagship.

Questions:

- ◆ What's the name of the Enemy flagship?
- ◆ What is the nature of the target the heroes are searching for?
- ◆ What defenses aboard the flagship guard the target?
- ◆ Will the heroes have to split up?
- ◆ Is the target itself dangerous?
- ◆ What must the heroes do when they reach the target?
- ◆ Once they've captured or knocked out the target, what immediate consequences must the heroes cope with?

Infiltration

The Situation: The heroes are approaching an Enemy stronghold. They must enter the stronghold, either by force or stealth, steal something or rescue someone, and then escape.

Obstacles: Barriers, enemy patrols, and security systems will guard the target and hinder escape.

Opportunities: You can start playing the mission just as the heroes are about to enter the stronghold, and you can declare that they worked ahead of time to gain some intelligence about what they're facing. They might also have a secret ally inside the stronghold.

Surprise: A formidable Enemy villain is at the stronghold, unknown to the heroes.

Questions:

- ◆ What sort of environment surrounds the stronghold?
- ◆ What are the heroes searching for? Will it be difficult to transport?
- ◆ What defenses protect the stronghold?
- ◆ Will any civilians interfere or be in danger?
- ◆ Once the heroes are inside, will the heroes find an additional objective they can achieve, at greater risk?
- ◆ Is this all just a trap?

Fighting Retreat

The Situation: Enemy forces have arrived unexpectedly to assault a Resistance base. The heroes must get a critical person, device, or data cache off the planet and out of the Enemy's grasp.

Obstacles: Enemy forces on the planet and in orbit will attempt to hinder the heroes' escape.

Opportunities: Since the heroes begin the mission inside a Resistance base, they may have access to a variety of useful resources and allies.

Surprise: An Enemy bombardment strikes the base, collapsing structures and blocking planned escape routes. Or possibly the Enemy has hidden a collaborator within the ranks of the Resistance fighters.

Questions:

- ◆ Where is the base? What's the environment like outside?
- ◆ What or who are the heroes protecting?
- ◆ Is there a limited amount of time before escape is impossible?
- ◆ Are the heroes using a risky method of escape, such as an icy mountain pass or an unreliable old starship?

The Chase

The Situation: The heroes have pursued a significant Enemy villain into a hostile environment, such as a battle-damaged Enemy starship, a vast automated factory full of hazardous equipment, or a colony battered by an earthquake. If the heroes can prevent the villain from escaping, they can deprive the Enemy of an important ally.

Obstacles: The environment itself is dangerous, and capable Enemy soldiers guard the villain. Also, every obstacle that delays the heroes gives the villain more time to escape.

Opportunities: The heroes might find a way to use the environmental hazards to weaken and delay the Enemy.

Surprise: An unavoidable environmental event might split up or trap the heroes.

Questions:

- ◆ Where are the heroes, and how is the environment hostile?
- ◆ What might make the situation worse as time passes?
- ◆ Who is the villain, and what talents can they use to survive?
- Is there some task the villain wants to accomplish before fleeing?

The Artifact

The Situation: The heroes are searching ancient ruins for an artifact that could be useful to the Resistance.

Obstacles: Traps, native creatures, and bad weather can assail the heroes. The heroes must also decipher symbols and clues to acquire their prize.

Opportunities: Once the heroes understand the local environment and the secrets of the ruins, they can use this information to their advantage.

Surprise: The Enemy is also hunting this artifact, and they'll appear just as the heroes think success is in sight.

Questions:

- ◆ What's this world like? What's hostile here?
- ◆ Does anyone live near the ruins? What's their opinion about anyone searching the ruins?
- ◆ What makes the ruins dangerous to explore?
- ◆ What rumors have the heroes heard about the ruins?
- ◆ What powers does the artifact possess?

Tense Negotiation

The Situation: The Resistance has invited the representative of a powerful faction to discuss an alliance. The heroes are helping to provide security for the meeting. Successful negotiations may give the Resistance a new ally; failure could turn this other faction against the Resistance.

Obstacles: An Enemy assassination team has infiltrated the venue and will attempt to kill important members of the Resistance delegation, as well as the visiting negotiators. The assassins are hidden and disguised, and they have the information and tools they need to pose a serious threat.

Opportunities: There may be other Resistance security officers the heroes can rely on, and if the heroes can befriend the visiting negotiators, those future allies may provide useful assistance.

Surprise: When the Enemy assassination team commits their first act of violence or sabotage, they plant evidence to blame the heroes for the attack.

Questions:

- ◆ Where are the negotiations taking place? What's unusual about this location or this world?
- ◆ Who is leading the Resistance side of the negotiations? What's their relationship with the heroes?
- ◆ Who is the powerful faction the Resistance is negotiating with? Why are they reluctant to ally with the Resistance? What makes them difficult to deal with?
- ◆ Do any of the heroes have a prior relationship with someone from the other faction? Will this work for or against the heroes?

The War Factory

This is an example of a more detailed mission outline, including descriptions of locations and characters. It should provide opportunities for heroes that like to use their wits, and for heroes who just like to blow things up. Adjust the details as necessary to fit your galaxy.

On the Enemy-controlled planet Karshovan, the industrialized megacity of Phrendis is the home of Weapons Facility 334, which produces the quantum matrices the Enemy uses in their most potent weapons. Knocking out Weapons Facility 334 will cripple the Enemy's weapons production and might tip the balance of the war. The Resistance has sent the heroes to sabotage the facility's quantum superreactor without endangering the city's enormous civilian population.

Opening Scene

How this starts: The heroes have infiltrated Phrendis and have arranged to meet someone who can put them in touch with the local Resistance effort. They're meeting this contact in public on a crowded thirty-story-high walkway suspended between two skyscrapers.

But then: Tough-looking thugs approach the heroes from both directions and start drawing weapons.

A few important facts:

- ◆ The armed thugs want to capture the heroes and claim the bounty the Enemy has placed on Resistance agents. An anonymous tip through their underworld contacts alerted them to the presence of the heroes.
- ◆ The local Resistance contact, Dorann, must not fall into the hands of the Enemy or the bounty hunters.
- ◆ The walkway is full of bystanders and is open to the elements. A quick shove could send anyone over the edge, and a sniper in either skyscraper could target anyone on the walkway.

How it gets worse: In the middle of the altercation, a swift hover transport approaches, carrying Sh'dax, a notorious bounty hunter. Sh'dax arranged this ambush and will lead a few more heavily-armed comrades into the fray to make sure the heroes don't escape.

Worlds and Locations

Karshovan

Environment: Desert and mud, cloaked by clouds of blue dust. Beyond the city, massive scars from automated strip-mining operations cover the landscape.

Population: Oppressed and overworked laborers, toiling to serve the Enemy.

Settlements: Several massive cities.

Society: A billion inhabitants locked into various degrees of poverty, held in check by propaganda, fear, and empty promises of a better life.

Resources: Rich deposits of raw materials and extensive military manufacturing facilities.

Hazards: Thick Enemy military presence. Violent criminal gangs.

Enemy: Tightly controlled by the Enemy, though there is a slim and fragile society of rebels.

Resistance: Only a few foolhardy souls dare to express sympathy with the Resistance.

Phrendis

Purpose: To provide machines and materials for the Enemy.

Appearance: An immense, smog-covered city full of industrial facilities and densely populated megatowers.

Surroundings: A grim, lifeless wasteland.

Features:

- ◆ Residential towers: Overpopulated and poorly maintained. Easy to get lost in.
- ◆ Criminal gangs: Preying on an already desperate population.
- ◆ Black market dealers: Operating out of hover transports, always on the move.
- ◆ City security forces: Heavily armed and dedicated to guarding Enemy assets, with little concern for the safety and well-being of citizens.
- ◆ City's elite: Well-paid and well-guarded executives, living in exclusive penthouses, enjoying luxurious clubs.

Weapons Facility 334

Purpose: To produce potent Enemy weapons.

Appearance: A bright silver twenty-story high pyramid.

Surroundings: Broad streets, bounded by a holographic fence displaying propaganda. Between the fence and the reinforced facility wall, a no-travel zone enforced by Enemy soldiers.

Features:

- ◆ Upper floors: Ten stories of offices and laboratories.
- ◆ Lower floors: The structure's lower half is a collection of large factory spaces.
- ◆ Force shield: When activated, guards the facility from assault.
- ◆ No-fly zone: Only military craft and the Chief Administrator's vehicle are permitted in the airspace surrounding the facility.
- ◆ Surrounding wall: A high wall patrolled by camera drones, fortified by automated blaster turrets.
- ◆ Wall gates: Guards with personal identification scanners are stationed at all gates. There's a main gate for visitors, laborers, and transport vehicles, and another, smaller gate for high-security staff and deliveries.

- ◆ Quantum superreactor: The reactor is underground, beneath the factory. It's guarded by hulking security robots, force-shielded checkpoints, and intensive ID checks. Anyone who wants to enter the superreactor must pass a bioscan that matches them against a database of authorized personnel. Camera drones monitor all visitors and workers.

Resistance Hideout

Purpose: To conceal Resistance members as they coordinate their activities.

Appearance: A dark, grimy sublevel of Tower ZV4 inhabited by tower maintenance robots.

Surroundings: Tower ZV4 is a kilometer-high residential structure, overcrowded and chaotic.

Features:

- ◆ Controlled access: The Resistance has hacked stairway door locks and elevators to admit their agents.
- ◆ Surveillance: The Resistance has also hacked the tower's surveillance network.
- ◆ Infirmary: Resistance fighters needing intensive care can hole up here.
- ◆ Supplies: The Resistance has stockpiled weapons and ordinance.
- ◆ Intelligence: The Resistance keeps tabs on Enemy activity, though their information is spotty and not always reliable.
- ◆ Information leak: Molly, a Resistance hacker, has recently been suborned by the Enemy.

Characters

Dorann

Occupation: Resistance fighter and contact for off-world allies.

Style: Secretive. Suspicious.

Look: Human. Brown skin, dark hair with flecks of gray. Dresses in ordinary working-class clothes to remain inconspicuous. Carries a small concealed weapon for self-defense.

Motives: Supports the Resistance. Will confirm that the heroes can identify themselves with the correct codes before bringing the heroes back to the Resistance hideout.

Strengths: Expert on Enemy patrols and surveillance. Knows how to get around the city unobserved.

Weaknesses: Not a formidable fighter. Could reveal Resistance secrets if the Enemy captures and interrogates him.

Enemy Sentiment: Hates the Enemy for what they've done to the people of Karshovan.

Resistance Sentiment: He won't hesitate to attempt any mission the Resistance assigns him, regardless of risk.

Sh'dax

Occupation: Bounty hunter.

Style: Relentless. Casually violent.

Look: Like an eight-foot-tall walking crayfish. Many limbs. Dark purple carapace covered with body armor and ammo belts.

Motives: Profit, and vengeance when thwarted. Intends to capture the heroes and sell them to the Enemy.

Strengths: Guile. Strategy. Firepower. Combat experience. Hired thugs.

Weaknesses: Conspicuous. Easily angered.

Enemy Sentiment: She has no problem with the Enemy while they keep paying bounties.

Resistance Sentiment: She believes the Resistance fighters are pathetic amateurs and is happy to sell them to the Enemy.

Chief Administrator Tull Revelle

Occupation: Administrator of Weapons Facility 334.

Style: Poised. Charming. Endless, confident energy.

Look: Human, tall, light skin, close-trimmed short dark hair. Handsome, healthy, and crisply uniformed.

Motives: Personal glory. Takes all credit for the efforts of the facility's staff.

Strengths: Fluent in deceit and negotiation. Extensive knowledge of the facility.

Weaknesses: Paranoia, envy, and self-interest.

Enemy Sentiment: He's certain that the Enemy will provide him an opportunity for glory and immortality.

Resistance Sentiment: He has only apathy for the lives and principles of everyone in the Resistance.

Anders

Occupation: Local Resistance leader.

Style: Grim but purposeful. Cynical but determined.

Look: Human. Dark skin, dark hair clipped down to her skull. Motley assembly of battle-scarred clothes and beat-up weapons.

Motives: Hatred for the Enemy and hope for the freedom of Karshovan.

Strengths: The loyalty of her forces. Experience in thwarting the Enemy and acquiring resources.

Weaknesses: Overworked and overextended.

Enemy Sentiment: She hates the Enemy fanatically, but she doesn't believe her band is capable of more than small hit and run missions. She believes that a strike against Weapons Facility 334 is impossible.

Resistance Sentiment: She has a close bond with the Karshovan resistance forces, and though she will assist Resistance agents from off-planet as best she can, her first loyalty is to her local allies.

Molly (short for Molistrum)

Occupation: Resistance hacker working for Anders.

Style: Sullen and resentful.

Look: Headphones-wearing humanoid gila monster. Overlarge jacket bearing consumer product logos.

Motives: Originally hateful toward the Enemy, she now believes that switching her allegiance to the Enemy is her only chance of survival.

Strengths: Skilled programmer and engineer.

Weaknesses: Not physically brave, and not particularly concerned with anyone else's welfare.

Enemy Sentiment: She's come to believe that a luxurious prison is better than dying free.

Resistance Sentiment: She's lost her confidence that the Resistance can win, and she's now just looking for a way out.

Complications

- ◆ The heroes must evade secret police and surveillance throughout the city.
- ◆ Molly may betray the heroes in exchange for a safe, comfortable position within the Enemy's ranks.
- ◆ The heroes may encounter unexpected security measures within the weapons facility.
- ◆ Sh'dax might reappear at the worst possible time.

Assets

- ◆ The city's massive population can provide allies and camouflage.
- ◆ High-tech equipment and tools are everywhere.
- ◆ Anders has access to information, weapons, and a few contacts throughout the city.

Chapter 9:

Sample Settings

If you want to play Save The Universe but you'd like to skip the process of creating the galaxy, here are a few pre-built settings for you. You could also steal elements from these when you're building your own setting.

Orion One

While humanity's first interstellar exploration vessel, the Orion One, is on its maiden voyage, an army of conquerors known as the Krin destroys planet Earth. Orion One's crew must flee to the stars and explore the galaxy, searching for ancient secrets that might help other worlds and cultures defend themselves from the predatory Krin.

Enemy Assets: The Krin are rightly proud of their vast war fleets and peerless admirals. The fleets maintain control of galactic travel by destroying other interstellar ships on sight. The Grand Admirals of the Krin are immortal due to a secret procedure the Krin bestow only on their fiercest warriors. Each Grand Admiral wears long, heavy chains that bear the medals they've earned during hundreds or thousands of years of battle. Every Krin warship is formidable, but the most awe-inspiring by far is the Cataclysm, a dreadnought so large that its gravity-warp engines can tear apart nearby planets.

Enemy Leaders: Five Hierophants rule the Krin, though not in perfect unity. When they aren't plotting conquests against their mutual enemies, they scheme against one another for power and glory. They receive the same immortality treatments as their Grand Admirals, but a Hierophant will rarely rule for longer than a century before an assassin's knife clears the way for a successor.

Enemy Footsoldiers: The Krin are tall, beautiful humanoids whose skin can be metallic shades of silver or gold, and whose eyes resemble precious gems. Their soldiers commonly carry twin-pointed spears whose blades can discharge blasts of energy across a battlefield.

Enemy Misdeeds: On the rare occasions when the Krin take live prisoners, they transfer these prisoners to biological laboratories, where researchers subject these specimens to horrifying procedures in search of scientific breakthroughs. If a world surrenders to the Krin, the

conquerors will construct mile-high statues of the Hierophants to loom over the largest cities of the conquered. (The Hierophants, of course, replace these statues swiftly as rulers rise and fall.) If a world defies them, or if the Krin decided that a show of force would convince other cultures to submit, the dreadnought Cataclysm will shred the unfortunate world to rubble, just as it did to the Earth.

Resistance Assets: The heroes may receive some assistance from small bands of daring rebels and pirates, such as the Red Hooks, the raiders who prey on Krin supply lines. But the heroes may find that their best chance of survival lies with an ancient secret society known as the Oracles. Rumor has it that a long-lived Oracle known as Coda has established a hidden temple dedicated to the study of long-lost civilizations in the hope of finding a way to defeat the Krin.

The Ship: Interstellar ships use gravity-warp drives, which allow them to travel between nearby stars in a matter of days, or across the galaxy in weeks. The Orion One used by the heroes has a sophisticated science and engineering laboratory, as well as powerful long-range scanners.

Strange Powers: A few fortunate visitors to Coda's hidden temple become connected to the Presence, a spiritual force that gives precognitive visions to those it favors. The Presence might warn an ally of an ambush or might provide a vision that leads to an unexpected opportunity. However, the Presence's messages are strange and cryptic, and inaccurate interpretation might lead to a false trail or disaster.

Day of the Xed

Human colonies in the isolated Strasbourg star cluster find themselves the target of terrifying space-traveling creatures armed with sophisticated biological technology. With the aid of their new psychic alien allies, the colonists have a slim chance of survival—but only if they can put their factional politics aside and unite.

Enemy Assets: The Xed are a horde of diverse, predatory organisms, spawned on planets converted by the Xed into vast hives. Most Xed have little more than animal intelligence and receive guidance from Xed queens, who command their underlings through telepathic biowaves. Queens can even use these biowaves to twist and crack other sentient minds, and former Xed prisoners might return to human society as brainwashed spies and saboteurs. As powerful as the Xed are, they might face stronger opposition if the Strasbourg Trade Fleet commanders had not become petty dictators, claiming the worlds of the Strasbourg

cluster as their personal fiefdoms and feuding with one another for territory.

Enemy Footsoldiers: The most common soldiers of the Xed are the Xedlings—scorpion-like creatures as big as human beings. They hunt in silence but emit hisses like escaping steam when excited.

Enemy Leaders: The Xed queens do not understand human concepts of mercy or negotiation. Their only goal is to guarantee their own survival by spreading across countless worlds and eliminating all other forms of life in the galaxy.

Enemy Misdeeds: The Xed devour all organic life on the planets they invest, collecting genetic material in search of characteristics that might enhance their power. The colonies that remain free of the Xed are ruled by fleet commanders whose only law is violence, and who permit crime to flourish as long as their precious shipyards are unmolested. The Xed queens find it easy to send their mind-controlled human spies into these chaotic colonies.

Resistance Assets: The Trade Fleets are mighty but divided. The salvation of the colonies may instead come from the Sunriders, a band of outlaws united against the invasion of the Xed and the tyranny of the fleet commanders. Or hope may rest with the Venarii, the enigmatic aliens whose psychic abilities shield them against Xed biowaves, and who seem determined to defend humanity for reasons they have never fully explained. They claim to come from a paradisiacal world in an alternate dimension, though this may be a mere mistranslation or Venarii metaphor.

The Ship: The heroes are members of the Sunriders, using a stolen Fleet transport to defend human settlements against the cruelty of the Xed and the tyranny of the Fleets. Trade Fleet hyperdrives propel vessels through interdimensional shortcuts, and trips within the cluster can take from hours to days. Only the largest Fleet battleships are capable of travel beyond Strasbourg cluster. The heroes can use concealed storage compartments aboard their transport to hide weapons and information from Fleet boarding parties, and they can use the ship's sophisticated communication suite to decode Fleet transmissions or to jam Xed biowave signals at close range.

Strange Powers: An order of Venarii philosophers teaches a psychic discipline known as the Dance, which grants supernatural willpower and insight to diligent students. It is said that a true master of the Dance can find the single word that will persuade a hostile army to lower their

weapons, or the flaw that brings down a massive fortress with a single blow. Those who practice the Dance have a difficult path to walk—the discipline demands rigid self-control and prohibits indulging in emotions or pleasure.

Planets of Peril

When their experimental stardrive malfunctions, a few heroes from Earth find themselves stranded in a distant star system whose inhabitants lack the means to attempt interstellar travel. The monarch of these planets is a vicious tyrant who wants to use the heroes' stardrive technology to conquer the universe. The only hope the heroes have of returning home is to repair their stardrive, and for that, they need the Breath of Aeon, a rare, flawless trizium crystal that serves as a symbol of the Emperor's authority. To get their hands on the Breath of Aeon, the heroes must help the beleaguered local Resistance to overthrow the Emperor.

Enemy Assets: Sharn, the Emperor of the Eternal Dynasty, claims to be the living embodiment of Aeon, a sublime entity worshipped by the cultures of his star system for thousands of years. Sharn has declared that, as the avatar of a god, his word is divine and may not be challenged. His soldiers condemn troublemakers without trial to labor in trizium mines, where they spend their lives digging for the rare crystals that power the Emperor's great factories. These draconian punishments have broken the will of the Dynasty's subjects, who cannot imagine freedom and dare not chase it.

Enemy Leaders: The rulers who founded the Eternal Dynasty were gentle and benevolent, but their successors fell prey to the temptations of absolute power. Sharn, the seventy-first Emperor, is ruthless and power-mad, and if he finds a way to send his armies to the stars, he will crush the galaxy in his grip. Legends claim that the unique trizium crystal known as the Breath of Aeon grants the Emperor supernatural powers, but few beyond Sharn himself know whether these legends are true.

Enemy Footsoldiers: The centurions of the Dynastic Army wear white uniforms with crested gold helmets that conceal their facial features. They will not hesitate to slaughter innocents at their Emperor's command.

Enemy Misdeeds: The Emperor expects the Dynasty's planets and moons to keep their local trizium mines operating and to provide resources and military conscripts on demand. As long as his subject

worlds comply, the Emperor is happy to overlook corruption or abuses of local authority, such as the blood-sport arenas maintained by the governor of the moon Astrago. If a world cannot meet its mining quota, the Emperor's forces respond with imprisonment, torture, and slaughter. When the people of the moon Uora rose in open rebellion, the Emperor's fleets dumped millions of tons of radioactive trizium mining waste into Uora's atmosphere, transforming it from an idyllic blue world into a toxic wasteland.

Resistance Assets: Only a few scattered and desperate bandit gangs, such as the Green Ghosts of the forests of the planet Mitril, risk the Emperor's wrath by raiding civilian and military targets. If the heroes can persuade these bandits to seek a more virtuous path, the outlaws might pose an effective threat to the Dynasty. Also, a few members of the Emperor's court and military are wary of their monarch's excesses and might be willing to stage a coup if they believe there's a chance of overcoming the Emperor's faithful servants. If anyone can lead the Dynasty with mercy and wisdom, it may be the Emperor's sister, Shenai, but Sharn imprisoned her the day he took the throne, and no one knows where he's holding her.

The Ship: The ship that brought the heroes here has a jump drive that could bring them back to Earth instantly if it was working. To repair their broken drive components, the heroes need trizium—not the ordinary blue trizium crystals that power the Emperor's reactors, but the one-of-a-kind green trizium crystal known as the Breath of Aeon. The ship's conventional thrusters are still operating and are powerful enough to cross the star system within a few days, or to travel from a planet to its moons in under an hour. The medical equipment aboard the ship's infirmary is also advanced far beyond Dynastic technology. The ship's outline is unlike any other local spacecraft, and the Emperor's forces are on the lookout for it.

Strange Powers: In a long-lost golden age, the Eternal Dynasty produced amazing technological devices that responded to telepathic commands. The means of reproducing these wonders has vanished, but a few wise scholars have learned to communicate with Early Dynasty relics. Some of these relics document historical secrets, while others possess powers far beyond contemporary Dynastic science.

The Vassal Virus

Earth in the twenty-fourth century was a paradise until an interstellar asteroid released the Vassal Virus into our planet's atmosphere. No one

is immune to the virus, but it remains dormant until its human host reaches the age of twenty-two. The virus then activates, altering the host's brain and leaving them susceptible to psychic control by a distant alien civilization. The infected adults of Earth—the Vassals—have transformed the planet into an industrial police state, dedicated toward constructing a colossal Portal that will allow the aliens to travel to our planet and claim its resources. Earth's youthful Resistance must fight back and find a cure for the virus before the aliens arrive.

Enemy Assets: Utopia, the global government established by the Vassals, has several divisions dedicated toward keeping the youthful population of Earth under control. The Oversight Division is responsible for monitoring Earth's population for signs of resistance, and their cameras and spies are everywhere. The Education Division is responsible for pacifying young citizens with lies until the virus enforces their compliance. Once the virus transforms a free human into a Vassal, the distant Masters can perceive that Vassal's every thought and can give commands that the Vassal will follow willingly and enthusiastically. No one knows how the Vassal Virus works or whether a Vassal's connection to the Masters can be broken, and the Vassals forbid any research along these lines.

Enemy Leaders: Celina Ungaro is the human figurehead of Utopia, and her compassionate face appears frequently in Education Division broadcasts, in which she praises loyal youths for their service. The Masters themselves are an enigma. Not even the Vassals know who or where the Masters are, or what will step through the Portal once the Vassals activate it.

Enemy Footsoldiers: Oversight Division field officers—also known as “rats” among discontent youths—wear gray uniforms, gray caps, and electronic wristbands called “links.” Links are primarily communication and data retrieval devices, but they can also project a short-range energy pulse to stun uncooperative targets.

Enemy Misdeeds: The Masters covet certain rare earths found most commonly in seabed mud, and the Vassals have constructed deep-sea mines to collect these materials. These mines are damaging the ecosystem of Earth's oceans and may eventually cause the extinction of all life on the planet, but the Vassals seem unconcerned by this danger. Although the Vassals cannot control anyone under twenty-two, they offer special privileges to youths who are willing to serve as spies to locate pockets of resistance. The Vassals are also experimenting with

treatments to render humans of all ages susceptible to the Vassal Virus, though these experiments typically have tragic, gruesome results.

The Resistance: Most rebellious youths wind up in street gangs such as the notorious Firebirds, who chase thrills and freedom through suicidal acts of theft and violence. More idealistic outlaws join the Message, an organized underground movement resisting the dominance of the Masters. Members of the Message communicate through coded shortwave broadcasts, gather in small groups, share information and steal tools and weapons. They have three goals—to prevent the completion of the Portal, to prevent deep-sea mining from polluting Earth’s oceans, and to devise a cure for the Vassal Virus. The leader of the Message calls herself The Exile, and through her guidance and inspiration, she has been the heart of the resistance, though no one has met her face to face. She claims to have been in an isolated, sealed environment when the Vassal Virus entered Earth’s atmosphere, and has remained there ever since, with only a shortwave radio to connect her to the outside world.

The Ship: The heroes of this story have a Mirage, a pre-Utopia experimental hoverplane equipped with a cloaking screen that renders it temporarily invisible, silent, and undetectable. The Mirage is also fast and agile and can outmaneuver almost any Utopian aircraft.

Strange Powers: Experimentation with gene therapy remedies for the Vassal Virus sometimes produces an odd side effect that yields brief flashes of extraordinary awareness. Those affected by the side effect can hear the quickening heartbeat that accompanies a lie, or can smell the trace of blood that proves an ally’s disappearance was foul play, or can catch the glint of sunlight from a distant sniper rifle scope. This ability is not always a boon, however, and just as easily, the side effect can paralyze a subject with sensory overload.

Star Carrier Crossbow

You are a group of brave starfighter pilots fighting on behalf of the Unity: a peaceful alliance of a thousand different cultures across the galaxy. You defend the Unity from a vast wave of robotic invaders that emerged without warning from between the stars. The robots call themselves the Assemblers, and they’re attempting to conquer the worlds of the Unity and enslave their populations in service to a guiding intelligence that the Assemblers call Control.

Enemy Assets: When the Assemblers conquer a world, they force its population to construct automated, Assembler-controlled mining

operations. Colossal mining robots strip the planet of materials to replenish the vast Assembler armies and space fleets. The Assemblers have already claimed the galaxy's best sources of cosmium, a material used in the Unity's most common power reactors. Shortages of this critical resource hamper the Unity's war efforts.

Enemy Leaders: The cybernetic intelligence known as Control resides on a sunless planet in deep space that the Assemblers have converted into a massive, fortified factory. The Assemblers strive to keep the location of this world a secret, and if hostile forces ever draw too close, an array of thousands of jump drives around the planet's circumference can transport the world across the galaxy in moments.

Enemy Footsoldiers: Assembler soldiers are robotic skeletons made of blood-red metal, armed with energy blasters that fire from the palms of their claw-like hands. They can speak and understand the common galactic language, and they typically shout "Submit to Control!" when they launch an attack. Colossal interstellar factory ships manufacture these soldier robots as well as self-guided starfighters and troop transport ships the Assemblers use to subjugate their enemies.

Enemy Misdeeds: To encourage obedience, the Assemblers promise that they will reward faithful servants with immortality by uploading their consciousness into cybernetic bodies, free from hunger, pain, illness, and fear. If a population resists, the Assemblers will destroy their infrastructure and deprive them of food, water, and medicine until they surrender. This war of conquest has shattered the former peace of the Unity, leaving some worlds vulnerable to completely human predators. The planet Ariock, for example, was formerly a quiet agricultural world, and is now a haven for pirates and criminals who seek to profit from the chaos of war.

Resistance Assets: The armies and fleets of the Unity are outnumbered, but still determined. They battle the Assemblers fiercely for every world, inspired by the efforts of leaders such as Admiral Rhyse, a master of naval strategy who is fiercely loyal to her crew. So far, the Assemblers have not reached Hytheria, the core world of the Unity government and the nexus of Unity culture. If Hytheria falls, the damage to the morale of Unity's diverse civilizations will be devastating.

The Ship: The heroes serve under Admiral Rhyse's command aboard the Crossbow, a carrier and troop transport. The Crossbow's starfighters—Shrikes—are more maneuverable than Assembler craft and carry signal jamming equipment to confuse Assembler communications and tactics.

Shrikes are not capable of interstellar travel, but the Crossbow's jump drive can carry it to a nearby star system instantaneously. The jump drive requires an hour or two to recharge, which means that a trip across the galaxy would take several years.

Strange Powers: With discipline and training, an organic mind can become sensitive to the cybernetic signals exchanged by the Assemblers. Those who master this technique call themselves Eavesdroppers, and they are sometimes able to intercept Assembler communications, anticipate the actions of individual Assembler robots, and even influence Assembler behavior. However, this special sensitivity costs the Eavesdroppers some of their personal empathy. Furthermore, prolonged exposure to high-density signal traffic, as might be found in Assembler factory ships or rendezvous points, can be harmful to an Eavesdropper's mind.

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While building this game, I took inspiration from several great games:

- ◆ Monster of the Week, Masks, and Blades in the Dark show how a roleplaying game can facilitate drama, reinforce genre, and help players get into the game with minimal fuss.
- ◆ Noirlandia demonstrates how a few simple prompts can help a group to build a rich, novel setting.
- ◆ The original Star Wars roleplaying game by West End Games is one of my all-time favorite games. It's simple, fast, and cinematic, and in my mind, the best of all the official Star Wars RPGs.

Fonts used in this book and the hero and saga sheets:

- ◆ GetVoIP Grotesque: <https://getvoip.com/library/grotesque-font/>
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