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Space Opera Adventure Generator

By Gareth-Michael Skarka

Introduction

This issue of Modern Dispatch follows the same theme we provided with the ***Modern Adventure Generator*** (issue #29), the ***Pulp Adventure Generator*** (issue #42), the ***Superheroic Adventure Generator*** (issue #66), and the ***Cyberpunk-genre Adventure Generator*** (issue #78), detailing a system for Modern d20 Game Masters to generate adventure ideas on the fly, giving enough of a core seed idea to proceed.

This generator is specifically for Science Fiction d20 campaigns -- specifically those of the Space Opera genre, as they are the most common variety of SF campaign, featuring the player-characters travelling the galaxy in a starship, visiting different locations and having adventures. The genre structure of Space Opera applies equally to campaigns where the PCs are independent, travelling in a vessel of their own, or travelling as members of the crew of a military vessel of some kind.

About

This issue of ***Modern Dispatch*** is a preview of Adamant Entertainment's new line of d20 science-fiction products, ***StarSystem.***

Similar in approach to how we handled the pulp genre with ***Thrilling Tales, StarSystem*** will be a regularly-released series of supplemental products for space-opera genre d20 play, including Advanced Classes, Setting Supplements, Adventures and more.

The line kicks off with ***StarSystem: Advanced Class - Space Ranger*** later this month.

The tables provided in this issue of Modern Dispatch will give a Game Master the bare outline of an adventure. That outline will have to be tailored for your specific campaign style. For example, a campaign where the player-characters are members of an organization like Starfleet will have very specific needs, and differ greatly from a campaign which is run with *Firefly* as its primary inspiration.

Learning from Screenwriting

The basic format for the random adventure seed is the dramatic core taken from screenwriting: all plots can be boiled down the following sentence:

*"The main characters must **[DO SOMETHING]**, but have to contend with **[COMPLICATIONS]** while being confronted by **[OPPOSITION]**."*
This is the basic structure of any story, whether it is filmed, written, presented in a comic book, or roleplayed. The variables change, providing a wide array of possibilities. For the Space Opera Adventure Generator, however, we'll expand that basic structure even further, allowing for a wider variation. So, the basic dramatic structure of our Modern d20 adventures will read more like this:

*"The main characters must **[DO] [SOMETHING]**, at **[LOCATION]**, but have to contend with **[COMPLICATIONS]** while being confronted by **[OPPOSITION]**."*

The main difference between the standard format and the one presented above is that the location of the adventure has been added as a variable, and, more importantly, **[DO SOMETHING]** has been split into **[DO] [SOMETHING]**.

Let's explain that a little bit further.

The "do something" is the focus of the adventure -- it's what drives the action. Making it a single category under this system will only result in 64 possibilities (by cross referencing two d8 rolls). However, after splitting the "do" (the verb) and the "something" (the subject) into two categories, that means that each have 64 possibilities, and can combine for a total of 4096 different results.

For example, take these: "Rescue the Princess", "Find the Murderer," and "Defeat the Alien." Under this new system, these three focii can be split, giving you those same results, but also additional ones such as "Find the Princess," "Rescue the Alien" etc.

This can, admittedly, lead to some odd results, such as "Rescue the Murderer"....but Space Opera stories are filled with strange stories and bizarre plots. As a GM, that phrase, which on its surface seems odd, begins to generate all sorts of ideas for me. Why would the PCs have to rescue a murderer?

How to Use the Generator

This type of system provides the Game Master with a framework...a springboard for the development of the Game Master's own ideas. The adventure concepts generated by this system will still need to be fully fleshed out, populated with statted NPCs, etc...but this system will give you a starting point from which to work.

To use the Space Opera Adventure Generator, the Game Master rolls two eight-sided dice, and cross-referencing the results on each of 5 category tables: **Do, Something, Location, Complications** and **Opposition.**

As stated before, **Do** provides you with the verb, **Something** provides you with the subject. Together, they form the focus of the adventure. **Location** gives you where the adventure takes place, **Complications** are those things that arise during the adventure to hinder the player-character's progress, and **Opposition** is the force or individual that is actively going against the PC's efforts.

Each category has 64 possibilities, so this system allows for 1,073,741,824 different combinations... more than enough to give any Space Opera campaign ideas to last for its entire run.

Do

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Assassinate	Assist	Find	Retrieve	Race	Negotiate with	Join	Steal
2	Combat	Discover	Protect	Attack	Serve	Defend	Take	Escape From
3	Guide	Avenge	Liberate	Foil	Guard	Blow up	Watch	Create
4	Chase	Understand	Escort	Rescue	Meet	Resist	Repel	Safeguard
5	Disguise	Travel with	Deliver	Defeat	Investigate	Support	Destroy	Battle
6	Move	Track	Aid	Assault	Get Past	Fight	Protect	Trap
7	Conceal	Obliterate	Encounter	Oppose	Trade With	Observe	Fight	Locate
8	Strike	Reveal	Beset	Shield	Contend with	Invade	Kill	Save

Something

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Agent	Murderer	Treasure	Scientist	Godlike Alien	Starship	Robot	New Race
2	Princess	Spatial Anomaly	Primitives	Rebel	Energy	Computer	Police	Government
3	Terrorist	Organization	Corporation	Stranger	Artifact	Pilot	Alien	Android
4	Friend	Criminal	Secret	Woman	Diplomat	Fleet	Planet	Warlike Alien
5	Smuggler	Enemy	Technician	Item	Man	Child	Outcast	Love Interest
6	Soldiers	Businessman	Bounty Hunter	Technology	Information	Creature	Outworlder	Ancients
7	Merchant	Villain	Ally	Rival	Mercenary	Broker	Politician	Captain
8	Disaster	Rogue	Discovery	Rebels	Weapon	Warrior	Priest	The Unexplained

Location

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Space Station	Jungle Planet	Asteroid Field	Frontier	Wasteland	Military Base	City	Underground
2	Ice Planet	Gas Giant	Villain's base	Desert Planet	Water Planet	Prison	Deep Space	Neutral Space
3	In Orbit	In Transit	Research Facility	Starship	Other Dimension	War Zone	Hideout	Government Installation
4	Planet	Core World	Outlands	Secret Location	Primitive World	Casino	Orbital Installation	Mountain Planet
5	Corporate Headquarters	Governmental Center	Temple	Lawless Zone	"Bermuda Triangle"	Moon	Bar	Planetoid
6	Transit point	Fortress	Spaceport	Trade Zone	Alien World	Border	Quarantined Zone	Spatial Anomaly
7	The Sun	Space Lanes	New World	Black Hole	Pleasure Planet	Void	Vortex	Space Habitat
8	Colony	Barren World	Skyplex	Under Water	Solar System	Homeworld	Ruins	Roll Twice

Complications

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	None	Betrayal	Rivalry	Trap	Government influence	Spatial Anomaly	Trickery	Unexplained
2	Travel	Squabbling	Distractions	Abduction	Barriers	Crash	Diplomacy	Ambush
3	Computer Failure	War	Security	Politics	Theft	Mystery	Vendetta	Fear
4	Mistaken Identity	Power Struggle	Enemy	Transport problem	Criminals	Corporate Influence	Drugs	Robot
5	Language	Battle	Alien Psychology	Side-tracked	Misdirection	Bureaucracy	Insanity	Enemies
6	Interference	Attention	Exploration	Equipment failure	Military influence	Godlike Alien	Invasion	Money
7	Monster	Travel Problems	Red Herring	Disaster	Contract	Interested Parties	Recurring NPC	Differing PC motivations
8	The Unexplained	Legal Trouble	Lack of trust	Desperation	Love Interest	Scientific Problem	Disease	Double-Cross

Opposition

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Government official	Terrorists	Gang	Mercenary	Spy	Specialist	Robot	Company
2	Creature	Enemy	Villain	Criminals	Starship	Outworlder	Assassin	Technology gone Amok
3	Ruler	Shadowy Figure	Ship Captain	Rebel	Organization	Warlike Aliens	Agency	Computer
4	Former Ally	Stranger	Police	Military	Veteran	None	Superior Aliens	Outlaw
5	Android	Bounty Hunter	Thief	Religious Figure	Explorer	Merchant	Invader	Traitor
6	Scientist	War	Mutant	Monster	Lunatic	Recurring NPC	Aliens	Pilot
7	Fanatic	Conspiracy	Technological Breakdown	Navigational Trouble	Empire	Enemy	Law Enforcement	Time
8	Friend	Paradox	Hazardous Environment	Mysterious Aliens	Puzzle	Clones	Unidentified Vessel	Roll Twice

Examples

I break out my d8s, and give a few rolls on the tables above. I will give an example of how it might be used to generate adventures for a space opera campaign, featuring player-characters patrolling the universe as part of a military-exploratory organization, boldly going where no man has....well, you get the idea.

My first roll is: 5-5, 6-8, 1-3, 4-8, 8-3. This yields a result of :

*"The main characters must **[Investigate] [Ancients]** at **[an Asteroid Field]**, but have to contend with **[a Robot]** while being confronted by **[a Hazardous Environment]**."*

This is a pretty straightforward adventure in the classic style: The ship discovers the remains of an ancient starship, adrift in an asteroid field. The crew boards the vessel to examine it, and accidentally activate a security robot, who attacks them. The airless ship, without gravity, provides an additional wrinkle that must be dealt with as they attempt to deactivate or destroy the robot and salvage the valuable relic.

My next roll is: 1-2, 7-3, 8-6, 1-6, 7-1. This yields a result of :

*"The main characters must **[Assist] [an Ally]**, at **[Homeworld]**, but have to contend with **[a Spatial Anomaly]** while being confronted by **[a Fanatic]**."*

The ship is dispatched to the homeworld of an allied race, to assist in protecting the world against an unknown energy field that is approaching the system. However, a cult of religious fanatics believe that this is the prophesied end of the world, and try to prevent any effort to block the oncoming energy.

My last roll is: 8-1, 6-6, 1-1, 4-3, 7-8. This yields a result of :

*"The main characters must **[Strike] [a Creature]**,at a **[Space Station]**, but have to contend with **[an Enemy]** while being confronted by **[Time]**."*

The crew must hunt down a creature that is preying upon the occupants of a defense-platform space station, but they'll have to hurry, because an enemy vessel is trying to use the opportunity to slip past the defenses and attack nearby colony worlds....

So, grab your dice and get rolling!

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