

Terran Empire

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Terran Empire is a setting book for the Star Hero line from Hero Games. It covers a classic Space Opera setting: space ships, galactic empires, lots of aliens, futuristic tech and psionics for those who want it.

Chapter One - History. The setting book starts with a history of the Terran Empire, which covers three hundred years. It starts with a period of near anarchy after the Xenovore Wars and continues to a period just after the final collapse of the Empire at the hands of rebels. Giving such a long time frame means that not every aspect of the Empire's history can be gone into. By focusing on only a few major events you can insert players into any time frame easily. Also covering such a long span of time allows you to start a campaign under different campaign styles.

A game set at the beginning will put exploration and unification as the key aspects. A game set during any one of the wars makes a good setting for a Space Military campaign. One during the height of the Empire as mankind goes really far out in exploration, can focus on trade. Toward the end can focus on rebels putting an end to tyranny, or the military trying to keep the crumbling empire together. Political, Espionage and Pirate games can be played at any time during the Empires reign.

Given such a long history, with only the most important of details revealed, the first chapter provides enough to choose a backdrop to set your Terran Empire campaign against.

Chapter Two - Peoples Of The Milkyway. Aliens, lots of them. Humans and aliens of the Terran Empire are detailed first, four human subspecies and four alien species are detailed. Each entry starts with the dominant species and then describes one or more aliens who are either subjugated or part of an empire with the main alien of each section. Even the side bars have short descriptions of aliens so you get as many as they could fit in. Over forty species are given some form of description. Most are given a full write-up of culture, home world, politics and appearance with a Package Deal for system info. The aliens in the sidebars simply have descriptions, a note on a major aspect and a Package Deal. There are a few who are given just a paragraph description. There is a wide spread of alien types, from strait humanoid, to those based on other species types (such as aliens evolved from birds, fish, or reptiles). There are a few that are completely alien such as a silicon based alien, and a parasite alien able to take control of a host species.

There is also a wide range of political, religious and social beliefs. With a good cross section of aliens and aliens mind sets you won't have much trouble making each species seem very different from

each other.

Chapter Three - Powers And Pawns. Chapter three gives details on a specific period of the Empire as a default setting. By picking a small period the book is able to provide details on several aspects. The default setting is just before the Empire slides into decline, during a period where its power has peaked but hasn't become completely corrupt. This is a good focus as it provides a wide range of campaign types including military, espionage, trade, diplomacy, and virtually any other Space Opera concept you can think of.

Starting with the Imperial Court and those around during the reign of Marissa III, and the eleven ministries she uses to govern the Empire. Most of them get a short description here, a few are gone into in much greater detail later in the chapter. The Senate is described next, with a group of important Senators. After that some of the ministries that PCs are most likely to have encounters with are given space: Justice Ministry (Imperial courts), Imperial Security Police (Imperial police), Mind Police, Security Service (or Secret Service), The Military (and the three branches, Navy, Marines and Army), Exploration Service, Diplomatic Corps and Intelligence Command.

The next section covers planets. Starting with the star system of the Terran Empire and then each of the seven other major powers. The Ackalian Empire, Conjoined Civilizations Republic, Mon'Dabi Federation, Perseid Empire, Thorgon Hegemony, Varanyi Empire, and Velarian Confederation. You should have enough strange and unique worlds in both friendly and hostile territory for any game.

Chapter Four - Galactic Society. This is divided into four main sections, covering the major aspects of what makes most any society go. The first is Travel And Communication. Travel covers not just moving from planet to planet but within a star system and from planet to space and back. It comes with suggested prices as well for moving things and people around as well as some interesting ideas on modes of transportation. One of the ideas I took away based on travel and how people get around is that a star system in the Terran Empire is analogous to a city (and surrounding area) in a modern society. Especially when you couple it with the Communication section. While the setting makes it possible to talk over long distances (hundreds of lightyears), it's not instant or fast. This focuses the average citizen into their own part of the Empire and their particular problems. This kind of setting setup allows you to have vastly different worlds within the Empire.

Trade And The Economy covers various trade goods, how they get around, what the costs are and similar important items. It also covers big business and some of the major corporations in the Empire. One of the interesting touches that it leaves in the hands of the Group is exchange rates. Being a space opera setting it normally forgoes such detail in favor of fast action, but if the game focuses on Trade such a thing could be an important aspect of the game. There's also a short section on automatons and robots and how they operate within society.

Religion And Philosophy covers nine major fictional religions that have appeared in the far future. A few of them stem from humanity, but most of the ones covered are alien religions and philosophical beliefs. Noting that there are as many religions as species (if not dozens per species), it only covers the very large ones that have spread through the galaxy. This is a nice addition to the setting and can go a long way to making the backdrop of a Terran Empire game that much more real.

The last section is The Underworld. First is a note on major crimes: piracy, smuggling, quarantine violations, treason and slavery. There are also several organized crime syndicates that we get some information on, but nothing very detailed.

Chapter Five - Character Creation. The first part is Package Deals, guidelines for building various professions of the Terran Empire. They include Imperial and Government (six packages), Law

Enforcement and Intelligence (six packages), Military (nineteen packages), and Civilian broken down into criminal (six packages), spacer (four packages), and other (six packages). These professions cover pretty much anything you can think of as a major character archetype in a space opera setting.

Next is Game Elements, covering the various aspects of the Hero System and how they're used in the setting. The Skills section gets most of the focus. With notes on buying very alien Alien Languages, and how Transport and Weapon Familiarities are handled in the setting.

The next sections are Psionics and Body Modifications (cyber and bioware). Both cover how they are treated in the system legally and socially. As well as information on how each are purchased mechanically in the setting.

Chapter Six - Equipment And Technology. Starting with General Tech Issues this chapter covers the settings measurement of technological level, ATRI (Available Technical Resources Index). Going over what each level provides, in a general sense, and disparate levels between industries (Ackalian military tech is ahead of their biotech for instance).

After that the chapter gets into equipment itself, with lots of write-ups and descriptions. Starting with every bodies favorite gaming tool: weapons. Then going onto defensive equipment, computers and electronics, and miscellaneous equipment. The last part is a price list for equipment in the current period. Both human and alien equipment is presented for a wide range of stuff for your players to interact with.

Chapter Seven - Starships. What's a space opera game without star ships? It's not space opera, that's what. The Starships chapter takes up most of it's space by going over various systems that make up a ship. Propulsion, weapons, defenses, sensors, and other assorted systems. It gives both Human and Alien information for various attributes. This allows the GM to custom build starships easily to fit various ATRI levels, or their own whim. It also allows the game to vary the ships a bit. After all, the setting says there are hundreds of companies building thousands of ship models, so the kit-bash approach suits the setting well from a mechanical point of view. The chapter also provides write-ups for major military vessels of both the Terran Empire and Alien powers.

Chapter Eight - Terran Empire Campaigns. This is a rather short chapter, but has two important parts. The first is guidelines for setting up a Terran Empire campaign. It discusses setting up the game, and "powers" such as Psionics and body modifications and what levels you want to allow into a game - too much Body Modification and it can turn into a Cyber Hero game, too many weird Psionics and you're approaching a Champions game.

The second half is the GM's Vault. This contains references to things from the rest of the book, going into the Real Story behind some events, providing the truth on various rumors and in case you need one a write-up for Empress Marissa III, the reigning monarch during the default period.

The Downside:

Not much stands out as being a downside to the book. One thing I feel compelled to point out simply because seeing it irritates me a great deal. Under trade some prices are listed as a random die roll times a number of credits. I'd prefer to see a range of numbers, the random die roll makes it feel like I'm reading a bad adventure from the 1980s. Especially since most of the trade section is written in price ranges or suggestions, to insert the sudden "roll here" element seems distracting.

The Otherside:

The first half of the book is mostly bereft of system information making it easy to pull just the setting

out and use it with your system of choice.

The setting itself is engaging, and by providing a long history with various elements to each period of the Empire you get a wide array of options for setting up a space opera game. While most of the details in the book cover just a small period there are suggestions throughout on how various aspects were different in other periods. Terran Empire does more than an excellent job of providing a solid space opera setting to game in.

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