

NO PLAN SURVIVES FIRST CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY



MASTER OF ORION

A 24-hour RPG

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Based on the *Master of Orion* series of games by
Simtex and Quicksilver Software, Inc.

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HISTORY

Long ago, in a past so distant that beings who have themselves passed into legend remembered it only as myth, there was a civilization called Center One. Center One was a nexus of commerce and culture whose denizens commanded technologies that would seem magical to the peoples of today.

At some point in this shadowy past the primary star of the Center One system became unstable, and some scientists predicted that it would go nova. The society's leaders scoffed at this and branded anyone who subscribed to the "nova theory" as delusional or dissident. Those who wished to flee the system were encouraged to do so. FTL travel wasn't possible at that time except by one means. The Center One system boasted a stable wormhole that provided the only way into or out of the system using STL drives. Hundreds of ships left Center One through the wormhole to become the Traveler Tribes. Fewer than 20 Tribes would survive to become the ancestors of today's peoples. Those who stayed behind died when Center One's star did indeed go nova – and the disruption of the space-time continuum that followed that explosion made FTL travel impossible for centuries to come.

The surviving Tribes prospered (or failed to) largely due to their choices of where to settle. Two Tribes in particular made excellent choices. One group settled in the Orion star system because of the abundance of habitable and mineral rich planets there. A second group was just as fortunate in finding the equally rich Antares system. When the hyperspace disruptions from the Center

One nova finally calmed down it was the Orions and Antarans who first ventured out into the larger galaxy to contact their lost kin. This head start allowed these two races to dominate their respective regions of space.

With their empires established the Antarans and Orions both started to develop their genetic sciences. The idea of unlocking the secrets of evolution appealed to the inquisitive Orions, while the Antarans saw genetics as a means to create super-soldiers. The Orions' announcement of their discoveries led to the first Orion-Antaran war. The Elder Races fought each other – with the help of minor races on each side – for over 400 years. The war ended when Orion scientists found a way to "fold" space around the Antaran homeworld so as to isolate the planet from the rest of the galaxy. Whether or not the spatial disruption that followed was the Orions' fault has never been determined. What is known is that space-time was once again altered so that FTL travel was impossible, and most other civilizations blamed the Orions. The Long Night lasted for over 15 millennia – plenty of time for knowledge to be lost and empires to collapse.

When the Orion Sector finally awoke from the Long Night the various races expanded into space once again. The inevitable conflicts over territory blossomed into the Orion Civil War. The Human race proved to be the dominant force in this conflict. Through a combination of shrewd diplomacy and military might the Humans founded the Orion Senate with themselves at the

head. The Orion Civil War ended with the establishment of the Pax Humanica. The galaxy remained at peace for nearly 10,000 years.

Meanwhile, the Antarans had not been idle within their bubble of non-space. They had developed their technology and their space fleet to terrifying capacities with no fear of outside interference. Mastery of dimensional science finally allowed the Antarans to escape their prison, which they left intact as a kind of fortress – the Antarans reasoned that getting in would be just as hard as getting out. Scouts rediscovered the former Antaran Empire's subject races and reunited them under the new Antaran Hegemony. The Hegemony then began a slow build-up of military power in preparation to conquer the rest of the galaxy.

The Pax Humanica ended when other races tired of Human rule. The Orion Senate fractured, and a second Orion Civil War broke out. This time the Orion Sector races succeeded only in weakening each other enough that the Antarans could move in and dominate them all. The Antarans declared themselves the new Orions – the original race had disappeared during the Long Night – and established the New Orion Senate. The six races that openly opposed the Antarans – the Alkari, Bulrathi, Darloks, Elerians, Gnolams and Mrrshan – were ruthlessly put down by the Antaran fleets. After this example the other races settled down and pretended to be content with their new roles as Antaran subjects.

The modern day has brought many changes to the Orion Sector. The peoples of the Antaran Hegemony, once unknown to the Orion peoples, are now common sights on Orion worlds. The mysterious Ethereans no longer hide on

the gas giant worlds that other races dismiss as uninhabitable. Worst of all, the Antarans' early genetic experiments have borne fruit in the form of the Harvesters – living weapons who have become intelligent beings. The people of the Orion Sector now struggle to survive in the face of extinction at the hands of the Antarans, attacks by space monsters and consumption by the Harvesters. Any hope that remains is in the hands of brave adventurers who can discover the lost secrets of the Orions or some clue to the continued existence of the Orions themselves, who may not be extinct. After all, if the Antarans could remain safe in another dimension, the creators of dimensional science could do the same. In spite of the dangers ranged against them, those who unlock the secrets of the galaxy still have a chance to make themselves masters of Orion!

CHARACTER CREATION

The first step in playing a role-playing game is making a character. In *Master of Orion* this process has six steps; Choose concept, choose Race, determine Traits, purchase Skills, choose Backgrounds and purchase equipment.

CONCEPT

A character concept is a description of a character's role in the team that the characters comprise. All of the following steps in character creation are much easier if the player has a clear concept in mind. A concept is usually something simple like "thief," "weapons master," "flying ace" or "scientist." Many games use classes as ready-made concepts, but *Master of Orion* is more open-ended. Players may use any concept that they like, subject to the GM's approval (some concepts might not fit the game that the GM intends to run).

There are no fixed rules limiting what abilities a character with a given concept can have. It's a good idea for a character's Traits and skills to be weighted toward qualities that will be useful for the concept – a flying ace with slow reflexes and low piloting skill won't be much of an ace, for example. The general recommendation is that at least half of a character's skill points (see below) should be spent on skills that are directly useful for the concept. The character should also have the Trait category that is most useful for the concept as the primary category.

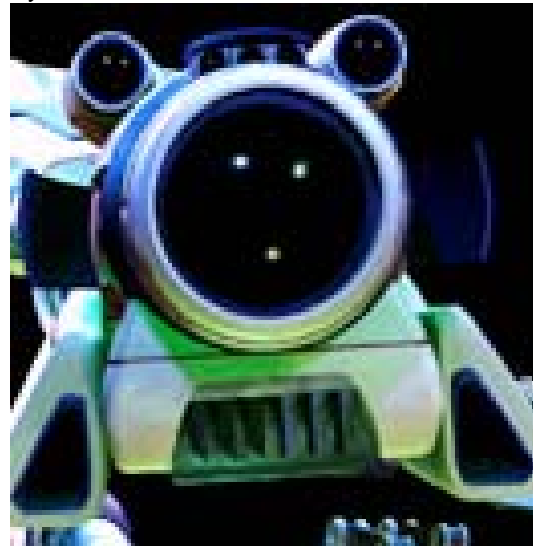
RACE

There are 21 player character races in *Master of Orion* (PCs may not be Antarans or Harvesters). Each race has a unique mix of abilities and disadvantages.

There are nine categories of races. Each race within a category is similar to the others, but categories can be very different from each other.

Cybernetics

Cynoids



The Cynoids are a race of cyborgs. They are sealed into mechanical shells shortly after birth. This intimate link with technology gives them great skill with machines.

Advantages: +10 Endurance; +10 Perception; -1 Difficulty Level to all rolls to repair machines

Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -10 Empathy; +1 Difficulty Level to save versus EMP

Meklar

Meklar don't just use technology – they are technology. These robotic beings not only have great mechanical aptitude, they can survive under conditions that would quickly kill any organic lifeform.



Advantages: +10 Endurance; +10 Strength; +10 Perception; -1 Difficulty Level to any roll to modify or repair machines; Meklar do not need food, water, air or sleep and are immune to the effects of telepathy and telepathy.
Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -20 Empathy; +1 Difficulty Level to save versus EMP; Meklar may not have the Psychic Background.

Ethereans

Eoladi

The Eoladi are living balloons that float in the dense atmospheres of the gas giant worlds on which they live. They are neither strong nor durable, but they can withstand extremes of cold and pressure that would be instantly fatal to most other species. Their many tentacles also give them great skill at fine manipulation.

Advantages: +20 Coordination; +10 Empathy; Eoladi are filled with gas that is lighter than the surrounding atmosphere and can therefore fly; Eoladi can live comfortably in the conditions of gas giant worlds.



Disadvantages: -10 Endurance; -20 Strength; +3 to piercing damage; Eoladi need environment gear to survive under conditions that are comfortable for denizens of T-type worlds (that is, all non-Ethereans).

Imsaeis



The Imsaeis are the cleverest of the Ethereans, and also the largest. Their society prizes ingenuity and subtlety, but their delicate anatomy makes them vulnerable to puncturing.

Advantages: +10 Coordination; +20 Empathy; Imsaeis are filled with gas that is lighter than the surrounding atmosphere and can fly; Imsaeis can live comfortably in the conditions of gas giant worlds.

Disadvantages: -10 Endurance; -10 Strength; +2 to piercing damage; Imsaeis need environment gear to survive under T-type conditions.

Geodics

Silicoids

The mineral-based Silicoids have the powerful advantage of not needing



organic food of any kind; they eat minerals instead. Their hard "skin" also makes it difficult to hurt them with most weapons, but pay for this by being slow.

Advantages: +20 Endurance; Silicoid "skin" acts as 5 points of armor; Silicoids don't need food or water.

Disadvantages: -30 Agility; -10 Coordination; Silicoids' movement speed is half of what the normal movement formula would otherwise yield.

Humanoids

Elerians



The Eleri Matriarchy was once one of the greatest powers in the Orion Sector, but now the race is a mere remnant of what it once was. They live on only as an example of the price of opposing the Antarans – but some say that the Antarans would have attacked them even without that excuse, so great a threat the Elerians' vast psychic pose.

Advantages: +20 Empathy; +10 Perception; female Elerians get the 5-point level of the Psychic Background for free, while males only get the 2-point level for free.

Disadvantages: -10 Strength (females); -10 Presence; all Elerians have the Magnate Background and receive no CP for it.

Evon

The mysterious Evon were among the races of the Antaran Hegemony. They avoid the mistrust that plagues the Darloks by using their skill at deceit to keep their own secrets rather than uncover the secrets of others. If the Evon have a failing, it's not caring

enough about others to uncover their secrets.



Advantages: +20 Will; -1 Difficulty Level to any attempt at concealing something, whether it's an object or data. Disadvantages: -10 Empathy; -10 Perception; Even all have the Fanatic Background but receive no CP for it.

Humans

Humans are natural diplomats – some say natural liars. Their skill at trading and diplomacy once made them the dominant species in the Orion Sector. Their main weakness is the lack of any of the special adaptations that other races have.



Advantages: +10 to any one Trait; -1 Difficulty Level to any attempt to persuade or deceive a non-Human.

Disadvantages: Trait modifier cannot raise the Trait to more than 100.

Psilons

The Psilons are hailed as the most talented researchers in the galaxy (with the possible exceptions of the Orions and Antarans). The Psilons' great scientific skills offset their serious lack of physical ability.



Advantages: +10 Coordination; +20 Intelligence; +10 Perception; -1 Difficulty Level to any attempt to analyze or invent technology.

Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -20 Endurance; -30 Strength; -10 Presence

Ichthyosians

Nommo

The Nommo are the result of genetic experiments conducted on Trilarian subjects. These nautiloid beings once lived on the same world as their parent race but have since branched out to make a place of their own. Nommo see war and expansion as their sacred duties – which does nothing to endear them to more peaceful races.

Advantages: +20 Coordination; +10 Intelligence; Nommo breathe water and are immune to the pressures of the deep.



Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -10 Strength; can't breathe air; Agility and walking speed are halved on land without special gear; Nommo all have the Fanatic Background and get no CP for it.

Trilarians



Trilarians are almost as gifted as inventors as the Psilons are and have the added advantage of a natural ability in dimensional science. Trilarians aren't warriors, but they will defend themselves if provoked. As a marine species Trilarians are fortunate in being able to colonize worlds that are of little interest to other races.

Advantages: +10 Intelligence; +10 Perception; -1 Difficulty Level on any

attempt to analyze technology; Trilarians breathe water.

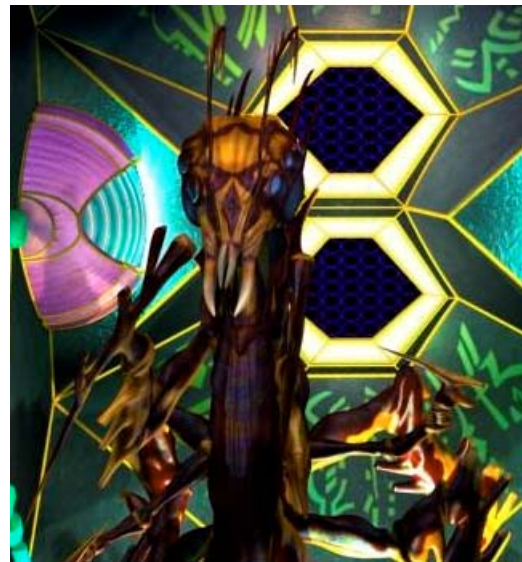
Disadvantages: -10 Strength; -10 Presence; can't breathe air; walking speed is halved on land without special gear.

Insectoids

Klackons

Klackons are coldly rational beings. Each one is bred into a caste for which the individual's talents are best suited. Klackons are fierce warriors whose rapid rate of population increase forces them to be expansionists.

Advantages: +10 Endurance; +10 Strength; a Klackon exoskeleton acts as 3 points of armor.



Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -20 Empathy; +1 Difficulty Level to any attempt to invent new technology or analyze unfamiliar technology.

Tachidi

The Tachidi are even fiercer than their Klackon cousins, but fortunately don't reproduce quite so quickly. The Magnate races remember the terrifying sight of Tachidi troops ravaging their worlds. What the Tachidi lack in brains

and creativity they more than make up for in sheer physical power.

Advantages: +20 Endurance; +20 Strength; a Tachidi exoskeleton acts as 4 points of armor.



Disadvantages: -20 Agility; -20 Empathy; -10 Intelligence; +1 Difficulty Level to any attempt to invent new technology or analyze unfamiliar technology.

Metashifters

Darloks



Darloks are reptilians with a generally humanoid shape when in their natural forms, but one doesn't always see their natural forms. Darloks are shapeshifters with a gift for hiding. This natural bent toward espionage makes it hard for other races to trust them. They paid the price for speaking out against the New Orions, and now there are only a handful of Darloks left. At least, that's how it looks. One can't always tell when they can appear to be of almost any other species...

Advantages: -1 Difficulty Level to stealth rolls; Darloks can change shape to mimic the appearance of any other flesh-based lifeform (but not Cybernetics or Geodics) – they can make small changes in size but can't change their mass, and can't mimic the target's physical abilities. Ethereans are just too big to imitate.

Disadvantages: +1 Difficulty Level to all non-intimidation social rolls against non-Darloks; all Darloks have the Magnate Background and receive no CP for it.

Saurians

Grendarl

The Grendarl are by far the most feared close combatants in the galaxy. Their cruel treatment of prisoners is legend throughout the Orion Sector, and they are universally hated for it. Only the Tachidi and Bulrathi can match the brute power of Grendarl shock troops.

Advantages: +20 Endurance; +20 Strength; +2 to unarmed damage (claws and fangs); Grendarl hide acts as 2 points of armor.

Disadvantages: -10 Coordination; -20 Intelligence; -10 Perception; +1 Difficulty Level to any attempt to modify or invent technology; +2 damage from cold.



Raas

The serpentine Raas began as slaves of the Sakkra but have since won their independence in battle. Though not as fierce as their parent species the Raas are quicker both mentally and physically. Their amphibious nature also allows them to meet Ichthyosians in their own element without being at a disadvantage.

Advantages: +10 Endurance; Raas hide acts as 1 point of armor; no penalties for moving in water.



Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -10 Coordination; -10 Presence; +1 damage from cold.

Sakkra

The reptilian Sakkra are expert builders and feared warriors. Most of

the Orion peoples believe that the Sakkra were the genetic basis for the Grendarl. Whether or not this is true, Sakkra troops inspire fear on the battlefield. But the real danger is that the Sakkra are both physically powerful and talented with technology. The New Orions watch the Sakkra carefully, and some believe that the White Fleet has already chosen its next target.

Advantages: +10 Endurance; +10 Strength; can build devices or structures in half the normal time; Sakkra hide acts as 2 points of armor

Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -10 Empathy; +2 damage from cold.



Zoics

Alkari

The Alkari are the best pilots in the known galaxy – which is not surprising for a race of avians. Speaking out against the New Orions has cost them dearly, but there are rumors that the Alkari are rebuilding their fleet in secret. If the rumors are true the Alkari may become a great power once again.

Advantages: +10 Agility; +20 Perception; -1 Difficulty Level to any piloting roll.

Disadvantages: -10 Strength; -10 Presence; Alkari all have the Magnate Background and receive no CP for it.

Bulrathi

Until the discovery of the Grendarl and the Tachidi the Bulrathi were the most feared ground troops in the galaxy. Their great strength offsets a general slowness of body and a tendency toward unoriginal thought, but few people will dare call Bulrathi "retarded" to their faces. The New Orions did, however, just before the White Fleet bombed the Bulrathi into submission.

Advantages: +10 Endurance; +20 Strength; +10 Will

Disadvantages: -10 Agility; -10 Intelligence; Bulrathi have the Magnate Background but receive no CP for it.

Gnolams

The Gnolams' genius as traders kept them out of many wars until the arrival of the Antarans. With their worlds devastated by the White Fleet the Gnolams are reduced to being peddlers and petty criminals – or so it appears. Some believe that the Gnolams have merely taken their economic activities underground to hide from the Antarans. If so, it's a good strategy; one doesn't pay taxes on clandestine transactions.

Advantages: +10 Perception; -1 Difficulty Level to any roll involving economic transactions; x2 to starting money.

Disadvantages: -20 Endurance; -20 Strength; all Gnolams have the Magnate Background and receive no CP for it.

Mrrshan

The catlike Mrrshan are the only other major species that is matriarchal. They are proud warriors with a rigid code of honor, but that honor did them no good when they instigated the rebellion against the New Orions. The Mrrshan were the first to feel the fury of

the White Fleet. Now they control only a handful of worlds and dream of the days when honor meant something in the Orion Senate.

Advantages: +20 Agility; +10 Strength; +1 unarmed damage (claws and fangs); -1 Difficulty Level to darkness penalties.
Disadvantages: -10 Intelligence; -10 Empathy; 2x effect from blinding light; all Mrrshan have the Magnate Background and receive no CP for it.

TRAITS

Traits describe a person's innate capabilities. There are three categories of Traits, and each category has three Traits in it. The categories are Physical, Social and Mental. Traits range from 50-100 before applying racial modifiers.

When determining Traits the player prioritizes the three categories as primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary category gets 20 CP, secondary gets 10 CP and tertiary gets 5 CP. Each Trait starts at 50 (\pm racial modifiers), and each CP spent into a Trait increases that Trait by +5. The Traits, by category, are as follows.

Physical

- Agility: physical speed and grace; used for dodging, climbing, dance, jumping and gymnastics.
- Endurance: physical stamina; used for prolonged exertion and to determine damage capacity.
- Strength: muscle power; used in contests of strength, to determine melee damage and to determine damage capacity.

Social

- Empathy: emotional savvy; used to "read" other people's feelings and intentions or to mask one's own.

- Presence: personal charisma; used to persuade, intimidate or seduce.
- Will: strength of character; used to resist Presence-based manipulation and torture, used to determine damage capacity.

Mental

- Coordination: manual dexterity; used to make or repair items and to fire ranged weapons.
- Intelligence: mental power and education; used to solve problems or remember facts.
- Perception: sensory acuity and focused attention; used to notice things.

There are also three meta-Traits called Speed, Stamina and Wounds.

- Speed: the ability to move quickly; $\text{Speed} = (\text{Agility} + \text{Strength}) \div 2$. Speed is the number of meters that the character can move during one 5-second combat turn.
- Stamina: Stamina is the ability to withstand exertion and non-lethal damage; a character falls unconscious when Stamina is reduced to zero. $\text{Stamina} = (\text{Endurance} + \text{Will}) \div 5$.
- Wounds: Wounds represents the ability to survive lethal damage; a character whose Wounds rating is reduced to zero dies. $\text{Wounds} = (\text{Endurance} + \text{Strength}) \div 5$.

SKILLS

While Traits represent innate capability in a broad area, skills represent learned ability in a more limited area. Having an appropriate skill makes a task easier to perform (for more details see the Task Resolution rules).

Skills have three possible ratings; Novice, Trained and Expert. A starting

character has 20 CP to spend on skills. A Novice rating costs 1 CP. It costs 2 CP to upgrade Novice to Trained and 5 CP to upgrade Trained to Expert. This yields a total cost of 1 CP to purchase a Novice skill, 3 CP for a Trained skill or 8 CP for an Expert skill.

Every skill has a number of specialties. A specialty is a narrower area of the broad skill in which a character has even greater expertise. A character may have only one specialty per skill. A specialty adds 1 CP to the total cost of the skill, and even a Novice may specialize.

The following skills are available to all characters, with the exception noted below. This list is not comprehensive; GMs are free to add other skills that are appropriate to their campaigns.

Art: the creation of beautiful objects including paintings, sculptures, musical compositions and even stylish outfits. Each medium counts as a specialty.

Athletics: physical endeavors like running, jumping, climbing, swimming and lifting weights.

Beam Weapons: this skill covers the use and basic maintenance of energy weapons like laser rifles and neutron blasters. Each specific type of weapon counts as a specialty.

Computers: characters with this skill can operate computers, write software and design (or circumvent) computer security. Characters may specialize by sub-skill (i.e. computer security) or by race (as in "Trilarian computers").

Crafting: the character can make useful items like jewelry, pottery or clothing. It

takes Art skill to make these items beautiful as well). Each medium is a separate specialty.

Dimensional Science: this skill represents knowledge of hyperspace, dimensional pockets and spatial disruption. This is the skill that allowed the Orions to design the dimensional bubble that imprisoned the Antarans, and that the Antarans used to escape that prison. Player characters may not begin play with this skill; they must find teachers in play.

Dodge: someone with this skill knows how to anticipate attacks and avoid them. Each form of combat – beam, melee, missile, projectile and unarmed – counts as a separate specialty.

Earth Science: this skill includes environmental sciences like geology, meteorology and oceanography.

Engineer: engineers are skilled in working on large-scale items like structures, fortifications, large naval vessels and spacecraft.

Ground Vehicles: characters with this skill can operate ground transports like cars, motorcycles and hovercraft. Each class of vehicle has its own specialty.

Gunnery: this is the skill for operating artillery (both naval and ground-based) and shipboard weaponry.

Investigation: skilled investigators can find or interpret evidence. They are also good at questioning subjects and knowing when they are being followed.

Leadership: uses of Leadership include motivating others, formulating plans and

analyzing the opposition's plans. No real strategist or tactician is without this skill.

Life Science: includes knowledge of biochemistry, biology, botany, ecology and zoology.

Medicine: this skill allows a character to treat illness and injury. Even the most skilled medic cannot heal wounds, but they can create conditions that facilitate healing. Medicine specializes by race. Veterinary medicine and poisons are also legitimate specialties.

Melee Weapons: this skill allows the use and basic maintenance of close-combat weapons like knives, clubs and axes. Only the Bulrathi, Mrrshan and Sakkra use this skill for anything but ceremonial purposes, but melee weapons are still useful in boarding actions – a sword won't blow holes through a hull.

Missile Weapons: this skill governs the use and upkeep of bows, crossbows, slings and other muscle-powered ranged weapons (and their ammunition).

Performing: skilled performers can sing, dance, act, tell stories or jokes and play musical instruments. Each medium has its own specialty, and each type of musical instrument is considered a separate medium.

Persuasion: this skill governs all manner of persuasion including, fast talk, lying, negotiation and seduction.

Physical Science: this skill grants knowledge of the physical sciences including acoustics, chemistry, nuclear physics, optics, quantum mechanics and thermodynamics.

Piloting: characters with this skill know how to fly aircraft and spacecraft. Piloting specializes by craft size and type – fighter (includes aircraft), scout, frigate, destroyer, cruiser, battleship or doomstar.

Projectile Weapons: this skill covers the use and basic maintenance of weapons that use chemicals or magnetic fields to propel a small projectile at very high speeds. Each class of weapon – gauss pistol, gauss rifle, slug pistol and slug rifle – counts as a separate specialty.

Psionics: Psionics skill includes both the theory governing psychic powers and the practical knowledge to use them. Mental combat uses this skill. Only active telepaths can use it for attack, but anyone can use it for defense. Only active psychics may begin play with this skill; everyone else must learn it in play.

Remotes: this skill applies to the use of automated manufacturing or repair systems, "waldo" units and remotely operated vehicles.

Sailing: a skilled sailor knows how to pilot watercraft. Specialties are by size (personal, small, medium or large) or by propulsion type (oar, sail, steam, combustion or electric).

Social Science: this skill grants expertise in the so-called "soft" sciences including anthropology, archeology, economics, history, mythology, psychology and sociology.

Stealth: characters with this skill can hide themselves, camouflage vehicles or encampments, conceal items, cover their tracks and follow someone without being noticed.

Technician: skilled technicians can build, repair, maintain and modify any technology that their homeworlds can produce. Each general type of technology – including computers, sensors, small vehicles or weapons – is a separate specialty.

Unarmed Combat: in an age of advanced weaponry and space combat use of this skill is a last resort – but being able to fight without weapons can sometimes mean the difference between life and death. This skill specializes by racial class (Cybernetics, Ethereans, etc.), and subduing is also a legitimate specialty.

BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds are optional extras that give a character more flavor. They can also add capabilities beyond those offered by Traits and skills, or inflict disadvantages beyond those of race. A starting character gets 10 CP with which to purchase Backgrounds. Any points not spent on Backgrounds may be used to buy Traits instead. Negative Backgrounds give a character CP instead of costing CP; these Backgrounds may be used to provide points for additional Backgrounds or to increase Traits.

Backgrounds cost –5, –2, –1, 1, 2 or 5 CP except for one, which costs 10. The list below isn't comprehensive; GMs are encouraged to add others according to the needs of the campaign.

Contact (1, 2 or 5): the character can call on a particular NPC for assistance. For 1 CP the Contact will only provide information. For 2 CP the Contact will perform tasks like basic research or legwork. For 5 CP the Contact will do big favors like obtain restricted goods or help out in a fight. A Contact will

always want payment of some kind for his services, but this doesn't always mean money. An exchange of information is just fine for a 1-point Contact, while a 5-point Contact may call for help when he's in a fight. A Contact can only perform certain kinds of favors – a judge can get information on laws or court records, a financier can get loans approved, an arms dealer can get weapons, and so on. The player must define the scope of the Contact's ability when taking this Background.

Elder Genes (10): the character carries certain critical gene sequences that were implanted by the Orions. Orion artifacts will respond to her as if she were an Orion (but so will Antaran artifacts...). She can sometimes activate Orion technology just by touching it, and she will be able to access any tutorials that the devices have programmed into them. The Antarans will kill or co-opt anyone with this Background whom they discover – and Magnates can forget about the co-opting part. This Background is extremely rare; the GM should not allow any PC to have it without a really good backstory.

Enhanced (2 or 5): the character has received some kind of treatment that gives her increased abilities. This can be cybernetic or biotech implants, genetic mutations or accelerated evolution due to Antaran or Orion experiments. The 2-point version yields a Trait modifier of +10 to any one Trait (this does affect the maximum) or a minor special ability like water breathing, night vision or claws. The 5-point version grants a Trait modifier of +20 or a major special ability like the ability to survive an extreme environment or a –1 Difficulty Level bonus to an entire class of rolls.

Fanatic (-2): the character is devoted to a political or religious ideology that non-believers don't approve of. Add +1 Difficulty Level to all non-intimidation social rolls against non-believers.

Magnate (-2): the PC's home planet is under the dominion of another race. Magnates may not legally own FTL ships, nor may they own or use beam weapons without supervision. The New Orion Senate also forbids Magnates from studying the Dimensional Science skill on pain of death.

Phobia (-1, -2 or -5): the character fears something – the dark, spiders, enclosed spaces, etc. Whenever she is confronted by her fear she must make a Will roll to retain her composure. The difficulty is Standard for the 1-point version, Difficult for the 2-point version and Daunting for the 5-point version. Success allows the character to keep it together for the rest of the scene. Failure sends her into a panic that lasts until the end of the scene or until someone else talks her down, whichever comes first.

Poor (-1, -2 or -5): Poor characters don't have much money. Starting money is halved (for the 1-point version), divided by five (for the 2-point version) or divided by 10 (for the 5-point version). The same modifier applies to the character's Regular Income if any.

Psychic (2 or 5): the character has a psychic gift for clairvoyance, telempathy or telepathy – having more than one requires taking this Background more than once. The 2-point version grants a latent talent; the character can upgrade the Background later to gain an active talent. The 5-point version indicates an

active talent. Active psychics may use the powers listed for their talents in the Psionics rules.

Regent (1): the character's homeworld rules over another world. The Magnate world might be a colony of the same species or a remnant of one of the six races that the White Fleet attacked. A Regent has a bonus of -1 Difficulty Level on any attempt to intimidate one of her world's Magnates. A Regent may also obtain licenses for Magnates to carry beam weapons (usually for use in her defense).

Regular Income (1, 2 or 5): the character receives a stipend every week of game time. This can come from a job, an investment portfolio, a trust fund, a patron or some other source. The character only has access to the funds while on his homeworld, one of its colonies or one of its Magnate worlds. Even when the PC can't get to the money the funds still accumulate and accrue interest. The value of the income varies according to the value of the Background - 250 Credits (1-point), 500 Credits (2-point) or 2,000 Credits (5-point).

Status (1, 2 or 5): the character is a member of a noble house or has some prestigious official capacity. When dealing with anyone who recognizes his authority the character has a bonus of -1 Difficulty Level to all social interaction rolls. This does stack with other social modifiers. At the 1-point level the Status applies to a single region of a planet (a nation or continent). The 2-point version expands this to a whole world. 5-point Status is good in one entire star system. There are levels of

Status beyond this, but they are not available to PCs.

Stigma (-1): the character is known but not loved. This Background imposes a penalty of +1 Difficulty Level to all social interaction rolls with a target group. The player must define what the Stigma is for, which will usually dictate what the target group is. For example, a Stigma as a traitor will only affect members of the character's own race while Stigma as a coward will affect warriors of any race. The penalty from a Stigma stacks with other social penalties.

PLAYING THE GAME

TASK RESOLUTION

Task resolution in *Master of Orion* uses three 10-sided dice. These dice should either be of different colors or one of them should be marked in 10s (10, 20, 30, etc.). Task resolution always uses percentile rolls. The 10s die is always the die that is marked in 10s, or the die of the darker color if neither is marked in 10s. The second die is the "ones" die. The remaining die, which should be red, is the result die.

When a character wants to do something, the GM first decides if there is a significant chance of failure and if the action will have a significant effect on the plot. If the answer to either question is no, then no roll is required. If there is a real chance of failure and the outcome could have a real impact on the plot the GM decides what Trait is most important for performing that action – Strength for breaking down a door, Empathy for knowing if someone is lying, Intelligence for analyzing an alien artifact, and so on. The value of that Trait is the base chance of success.

The Trait value alone does not determine the chance of success, however. Every roll also has a Difficulty Level. Each Difficulty Level has a modifier. Apply the modifier for the appropriate level to the base percent chance. This is the final success chance for the roll. The player must roll percentile dice and get a result equal to or under the final success chance. The

player then reads the result die to determine the degree of success or failure. A roll of 1-3 indicates a marginal result, 4-6 indicates a normal result, 7-9 indicates a spectacular result and 10 indicates a critical result. The GM will determine on a case-by-case basis exactly what each outcome is, with the result of the red die as a guide.

Difficulty Level	Modifier
Insulting	Automatic success
Trivial	+25
Easy	+10
Standard	±0
Challenging	-10
Difficult	-25
Daunting	-50
Hopeless	Automatic failure

Having a skill that applies to the roll makes things easier. Each level of skill reduces the Difficulty Level by one. Thus, a Novice skill subtracts one Difficulty Level while an Expert skill subtracts three.

Racial modifiers can also affect the chance of success. Apply any racial bonuses or penalties to the Difficulty Level. Once all modifiers are applied the Difficulty Level cannot be greater than Hopeless or less than Insulting.

If the final success chance = 100% or more, treat the roll as being at the Insulting Difficulty Level.

Example: Psumos the Psilon is trying to analyze an unusual artifact. The GM decides that this is an Intelligence task using the Technician skill. Psumos has an Intelligence of 85 with an Expert skill level. The GM sets the base Difficulty Level at Daunting (it's a really complicated artifact), but Psumos' skill drops it to Standard and his racial modifier drops it down to Easy. Psumos has a final success chance of 95. Psumos' player rolls and gets a 97 with a 10 on the red die – critical failure! Psumos touches his probe to what he didn't know is a power lead, and learns the hard way that the millennia-old power cell is still active. When the Psilon wakes up he will handle the artifact with a lot more care.

COMBAT

Combat in *Master of Orion* is just like other task resolution. The only differences are a more limited selection of Traits used for attack. The Difficulty Level of a combat roll is usually Standard, but range and visibility can modify this according to the list below. These modifiers are not cumulative; use only the worst penalty that applies.

- Close combat (with or without weapons): Standard difficulty
- Limited visibility (due to darkness, fog or other conditions): +2 Difficulty Levels
- Long-range combat (with weapons or psychic powers): +2 Difficulty Levels
- Ranged combat (as above): +1 Difficulty Level
- Visibility zero (blindness, total darkness or other inability to see): +3 Difficulty Levels

Actively dodging makes a character harder to hit. Add +1 to the Difficulty Level for each level of Dodge

skill (+1 for Novice, +2 for Trained, etc.). But an appropriate combat skill can negate this bonus at the same rate (-1 Difficulty Level if the attacker has Novice skill, and so on).

After all of these modifiers apply a modifier equal to the difference between the attacker's attack Trait and the target's defense Trait. The modifier is a penalty if the defense Trait is higher or a bonus if the attack Trait is higher. This yields the final success chance for the attack.

On a critical failure of an attack roll the attacker will lose or break his weapon (if any) or injure himself (if unarmed). An unarmed attacker takes half the result of the red die (round up) to his Stamina after a critically failed attack. This represents hitting a wall or sharp object instead of the target, or hitting a hard or sharp part of the target.

Damage and Healing

Damage inflicted by a successful attack is equal to the result of the red die plus any modifiers from weapons, situation or racial disadvantages. The damage applies to the target's Stamina if the result of the attack roll is even or to Wounds if the result is odd. On a critical success the damage is doubled. If Stamina is reduced to zero any leftover damage is applied to Wounds.

A character who survives an attack will eventually heal. Stamina heals at the rate of one point per minute, while Wounds heals at the rate of one point per day. Successful medical care doubles the rate of healing.

Physical Combat

In physical combat Coordination is the usual attack Trait. The defense Trait is Agility if the target is actively dodging (and the target may use Dodge

skill). If the target defends passively the defense Trait is Endurance.

For grappling contests – wrestling, applying or escaping holds or throwing an opponent – the attack Trait is Strength instead of Coordination. Strength is also the defense Trait for active grappling defense. Unarmed Combat skill is used for active defense instead of Dodge.

Psychic Combat

Psychic combat is just like physical combat, but with different attack and defense Traits.

For telepathic conflict the attack Trait is Presence. The defense Trait is Will for passive defense or Empathy for active defense.

For telepathic conflict the attack Trait is Intelligence, which is also the defense Trait for active defense. Passive defense against telepathy uses Perception.

For all physic combat the Psionics skill can be used for both attack and defense. Psionics even applies to passive defense; skilled mentalists are harder to affect even when they're not expecting an attack.

Space Combat

Space combat works just like other physical combat except that the attack and defense Traits are based on the ships' Traits instead of the characters' abilities. A gunner on the attacking ship may use his Gunnery skill, while the pilot of the defending ship may use her Piloting skill in place of Dodge skill.

Ships don't take damage in the same way that characters do. Any damage sustained by a ship is applied to its Agility, Coordination, Perception or Wounds instead. This denotes damage to the engines, control systems, sensors

or hull, respectively. Roll 1d10 and consult the chart below. A ship's armor reduces damage normally.

Die Result	Trait Affected
1-2	Perception
3-4	Coordination
5-7	Agility
8-10	Wounds

A character who gets hit by a ship scale weapon is in for a world of hurt; one point of ship scale damage = 20 points of character scale damage.

PSIONICS

Some of the races of the Orion Sector have unlocked the potential of the mind and developed psionic talents. This gives some the ability to conduct psychic combat while others gain paranormal senses. There are three categories of psychic talent, and each one requires a separate purchase of the Psychic Background.

The rules governing the abilities possible with psychic talents are deliberately vague. No one has yet discovered the full range of possible uses for psionics (except maybe the Orions). The descriptions here are intended to give GMs and players some idea of what the possibilities are. The system is designed to reward player creativity; if a player comes up with something that the GM feels is consistent with the limits of the talent, the GM should probably allow it. The only specific rule is that psychic talents aren't terribly powerful. At best a psionic might be able to mentally defeat a single opponent or scry information that could be obtained more slowly by mundane means. Psionics can only create world-shaking effects when many skilled practitioners work in concert.

Psionics rolls are affected normally by range penalties. The GM should also apply situational modifiers if he feels that they are appropriate.

Clairvoyance

- Glimpse a probable future event;
- Witness something happening in the present at another location;
- "Read" the past of a person, place or object;
- Sense the approach of danger;
- Obscure psychic traces to keep other clairvoyants from reading them.

Clairvoyance rolls are affected normally by range penalties, but those penalties sometimes involve time rather than distance. Sometimes they involve time *and* distance. Apply a +1 Difficulty Level modifier for any time span greater than 24 hours, +2 levels for more than a week and +3 levels for more than a month. These penalties are cumulative with any penalties imposed by range.

Telempathy

- Sense someone's emotional state or physical condition;
- Communicate one's own emotional state or physical condition to someone else;
- Alter the target's emotional state;
- Project a smell, taste or touch illusion;
- Link two or more people emotionally.
- Harm the target with a psychic bolt.

Telempathy has no effect on Meklar; this talent only works on organic minds.

Telepathy

- Send thoughts to someone else;
- Read someone's surface thoughts;
- Probe concealed thoughts;

- Deep-probe subconscious thoughts or repressed memories;
- Enter someone's dreams;
- Project a sight or sound illusion;
- Mentally link two or more people.
- Harm the target with a psychic bolt.

Telepathy has no effect on Meklar; this talent only works on organic minds.

EXPERIENCE

Characters in Master of Orion can improve their abilities over time. A PC earns a base award of 1 CP at the end of each game session. The GM may award a second CP for exceptional role-play or completing an especially difficult session. Awarding more than 2 CP for a session is not recommended; this will make characters develop too quickly.

Earned CP are spent just like the ones gained during character creation; a character may improve Traits, learn or upgrade skills or gain Backgrounds. Some Backgrounds should be justified by events that happened in play. For example, one doesn't suddenly become Enhanced – one has to purchase implants and have them installed.

Master of Orion has one important drawback; the possibility that characters can reach a point where further character development isn't possible. A character can increase all Traits to their racial maximums, learn all skills to Expert, load up on Backgrounds and collect huge amounts of cash and other resources. When a character becomes so powerful that the GM can no longer present reasonable challenges for him, it's time to remove that character from play. There are three ways to do this that are fun for the GM and the players alike.

Passing the Torch

The character goes quietly into that good night – but before he goes he passes on some vital bit of information, bequeaths an inheritance or leaves an interesting bit of tech. The retiring character may leave any one of his Backgrounds (as long as the GM rules that it can be transferred) or one piece of equipment to the player's new character. Passing the torch is the only way that most PCs can begin play with Dimensional Science skill.

Grabbing the Brass Ring

The character cashes in her adventuring gear and all of the favors that she is owed to purchase an estate, private asteroid or whatever. She then retires in style. With this option the GM can bring the character back as an NPC from time to time – the retired PC may even act as a patron for a new group of characters.

Blaze of Glory

The character goes on one last mission trying to make that one big score that will allow him to grab the brass ring as above. What the PC doesn't know is that the player's intention is for him to die gloriously. The GM and player will work together to provide the character with the kind of end that lives on in song and story – or as a cautionary tale. If this is done right the players will still be talking about the character's death scene months later.

ADVERSARIES

ANTARANS

The Antarans are the undisputed rulers of both the New Orion Senate, which is a thinly-disguised Antaran Empire. Their technology is equal to that of the Orions, and their ruthlessness is unsurpassed. No one really likes the Antarans, but some members of races from the former Antaran Hegemony willingly serve them – it's better than the alternative, which is Magnate status at best or extinction at worst. After what happened to the Mrrshan, Elerians, Alkari, Darloks, Gnolams and Bulrathi nobody speaks out openly against the Antarans. Some PCs may choose to fight the power anyway, but they'll have to be smart about it; open rebellion always gets squashed, and the Antarans don't even pretend to work hard at it.

No game mechanics are provided for the Antarans or their technology. This is because of the well-known gaming adage, "If it has stats, we can kill it." PCs shouldn't be able to win any direct confrontation with the Antarans. Taking on Antaran agents should be challenging enough. If a group of PCs is ever enough of a threat to require the personal attention of the Antarans, they should know that their only hope of survival lies in running for their lives. The official game mechanic for Antarans is that they can do whatever the GM feels they need to do – except catch a PC who is smart enough to run for it at the first opportunity. PCs don't win against the Antarans by being powerful, they win by staying under the radar.

ITHKUL

The Ithkul are the only major race of Harvesters. The Antarans created them as bio-weapons for the elimination of troublesome races. The project succeeded far too well. The Ithkul got loose and now roam the galaxy seeking whom they may devour.

In addition to being expansionists the Ithkul have a gruesome need – they subsist by feeding on other sapient species. Exactly how they do this is unclear; no one who has witnessed the process is available for comment. The Elerians claim that the consumption is both physical and psychic – Ithkul don't just eat bodies, they somehow consume their victims' souls. Because of this the mere suggestion of an Ithkul presence is enough to send any star system into a panic, and even blood enemies will band together against a Harvester threat.

Many scientists believe that the Ithkul have spawned lesser races of Harvesters who share the parent races' appetites. If this is true, few people have had the opportunity to study the differences between the true Ithkul and other Harvesters. Most races would rather destroy a Harvester ship on sight, anyway.

Advantages: +30 Endurance; +20 Strength; +20 Coordination; Ithkul take half damage (round down) from all attacks.

An Ithkul can consume the "essence" of an unresisting (bound or unconscious) victim. The target takes one point of damage for every three turns that the Harvester maintains

contact. The damage always starts with Stamina and cannot affect Wounds until Stamina reaches zero. The process is extremely painful. Nothing but a desiccated corpse remains of someone who is killed in this fashion. Ithkul have no interest in dead bodies – only the living have what the Harvesters need.

Disadvantages: -30 Empathy; -10 Speed; any non-intimidation social interaction with non-Ithkul begins at the Hopeless Difficulty Level, and the victim has a bonus of +10 to the defense Trait.

MASTER OF ORION CHARACTER SHEET

Character Name: _____

Concept: _____ Race: _____

Sex: M F Age: _____ Player: _____

Description (height, hair color, etc.): _____

TRAITS

Physical	Social	Mental
Agility:	Empathy:	Coordination:
Endurance:	Presence:	Intelligence:
Strength:	Will:	Perception:
Stamina:	Wounds:	

SKILLS

Skill/Specialty	Novice	Trained	Expert	Skill/Specialty	Novice	Trained	Expert
Athletics				Melee Wpn.			
Beam Wpn.				Missile Wpn.			
Computers				Performing			
Crafting				Persuasion			
Dimen. Sci.				Physical Sci.			
Dodge				Piloting			
Earth Sci.				Proj. Wpn.			
Engineer				Psionics			
Ground Veh.				Remotes			
Gunnery				Sailing			
Investigation				Social Sci.			
Leadership				Stealth			
Life Sci.				Technician			
Medicine				Unarmed Cbt.			

BACKGROUNDS/EQUIPMENT
