

Alien Wars

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Alien Wars is a Military Sci-Fi campaign setting for Star Hero. It's set in the twenty-fourth century, mankind has populated a small sector of the galaxy, encountered a few alien species that it has under it's economic sway, and is falling into bureaucratic decay. Then the alien attack, Xenovores. The setting covers a full century of warfare as the humans are threatened with extinction. Within this time period any number of military style campaigns can be set, not just a push back the invaders type game.

Chapter One - A History Of The Alien Wars. Since the book covers the entire Human-Xenovore war from just before it starts to just after it ends this chapter presents itself mostly as a historical text. This chapter covers all major events that go on in Human Space and Government from just prior to the war to it's conclusion. Human space starts this period governed by a Senate composed of representatives from Senatorial Worlds, who control Colonial Worlds. This mix allows for the futuristic classic sci-fi style planets and cities (massive cities, futuristic gadgets, et cetera) and the frontier like aspects of exploration (low tech, frontier attitudes, a futuristic wild west if you need it). The Colonial Worlds are under the control of the Senatorial Worlds, sometimes this is amicable, sometimes it's total exploitation. The set up allows for a variety of worlds, attitudes, governments (from democracies to megacorporations) to rule various parts of Human Space. Of course all this diversity leads to serious mistakes when the Xenovores attack, causing the already fractious Human Space to split. Causing the second major style of the setting, a civil war setting where some worlds split off to form their own cooperative and the Home Worlds, now under the control of a militaristic dictator. They fight each other (espionage!) and have the looming threat of the advancing Xenovore Empire on their now shrinking borders. The Xenovore incursion deep into Human Space all the way to Earth sets off the third major aspect of the setting, the unification of Humanity under a Navy Admiral and the fight of the species to push back and eventually destroy the Xenovore threat.

Within these three major settings any number of campaigns can form, Chapter Eleven has a bunch of solid ideas on this topic. Don't let the historical aspect of this chapter make it so the outcomes are set in stone, after all it's your game and the very broad strokes this "history" is presented with leaves plenty of holes to fill in.

Chapter Two - Species Of Terran Space. This short chapter details the races that live in Human Space. Starting with Humans and four sub-species of human (Heavy, Martian, Selkie, and Spacer). Five more aliens species are detailed here as well, each one started out with a lower tech level than Humans (as Humans explored space they encountered them as pre-colonization species). Denebians, Hrac'Darese,

Jhinu, Rigellians, and Vayathurans. All are humanoid, and all but the Denebians fall into the "Humans with odd colored skin" variation of aliens. None of these species are detailed in Terran Empire so if you have that sourcebook this includes some more aliens to include in those campaigns.

Chapter Three - United Earth And Beyond. Starting with the United Earth Government is the name of the body throughout the century, though how it functions changes over time. This starts with that information and information on how major aspects work (Law Enforcement, Intelligence, Economies). It also details some of the major and important planets and systems in Human Space. Military Locations details the strategic places within Human Space. It also has details on Important Battle Sites, which are all good places to stage part of a campaign and have the PCs directly involved in important strategic battles.

Chapter Four - Life In A Time Of War. This covers what it was like to be a citizen of Human Space during this war torn period. Starting with Communication and Travel, which goes into how Humans got around (most don't, the majority of humanity never leaves their home planet, making invasions particularly grim) and got information from one place to another (slowly). Trade And Economy covers the important aspect of how society got stuff around. Economy during war, especially with slow travel taking months to get to some planets, is difficult at best. This goes into what goods were transported where, how much could be made (should you settle on a campaign focusing on trade), and how trade works in the setting. The Criminal Underworld covers some the extensive black market that evolves during war time, namely piracy and smuggling, as well as two major criminal gangs to contend with (or be a part of).

This chapter provides some good information on how the civilian side of things was affected by the civil war and invasion both. Even if the PCs are all part of the military this section will help add background to the game, as well as motivation to make things better quickly.

Chapter Five - The United Earth Military. This starts with an Overview of the military and it's condition from the start of the century (not very good) to the end of the century. It covers each of the major points in the century where military thought and spending changed due to either the Xenovore threat or the Civil War. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to detailing the two sides of the military in the latter part of the century when Humanity unifies and fights the Xenovore threat en masse. It's easy to adopt backwards from this point to any other period in the setting. The military is split into two halves, the Army and the Navy. Both sections cover Structure, which covers how they divided their forces, what units they utilized and how they all fit together. And A Day In The Life, which has information on training, living conditions and some medals that your PCs might earn. Other Branches covers the Exploration Service, Intelligence Command and Civil Defense Auxiliary (planetary militias).

With this information on the how the military is structured you have the ground work for setting up a detailed Military Campaign. While it does present the military in the latter half of the century specifically it does provide information on what was different before Humanity unified.

Chapter Six - Pilot, Adept, Solider, Spy. This chapter is Character Creation, providing the Hero System Rules used to create the proper feel of the characters in this setting as presented. Thirty-three Package Deals are provided for both civilian and military occupations. These allow you to set up uniform expectations of just what any given job entails (especially good for the military careers). The Skills, Perks, Talents, Powers, and Disadvantages sections provide information on how each of those is treated in this settings context. Psionics covers, in brief, how they work in the setting (very low powered, and extremely rare to the point you could easily leave them out if you don't want them at all).

Chapter Seven - The United Earth Army. This chapter covers the technology used by the military.

Starting with how the United Earth classifies technology levels. It also provides an infantryman's gear, the heart and soul of the military in the Xenovore war. Weapons covers which weapons were used both early on and later as technology advanced. Combat Drugs provides enhancements that the soldiers took on the grim battlefields of the future to keep the edge. Miscellaneous Equipment covers combat gear. Computers provides the Tactical Computer AIs that the Humans first rely on heavily, then finally almost completely ignore. Vehicles and Starships go into the militaries transports, tanks, fighters, and spaceships that they make use of throughout the war, including the variations that were developed as the war raged on. The price list at the end provides prices for three different periods of the century, important information in case you want to run a Traders style campaign.

Chapter Eight - The Xenovores. The Threat From Beyond. The major enemy of the century. The Xenovores come not to conquer and rule, but to vanquish and obliterate. Humanity is literally fighting off extinction at the hands of a nightmarish alien species. The Intel chapter is divided into three sections. Each section focuses on what humans know at the start of the invasion, what they learn as the Xenovores push towards Earth, and finally the insight gained as they unify and take the fight to Xenovore space. Each section is written as if more or less correct for the intel gathered at that point, making this an easy part of the book to photocopy the proper intel from and hand to the Players for their own Character's knowledge. One thing to keep in mind, the Xenovores cannot be reasoned with, there is no Human conspiracy at any level to work with them, all intel on the Xenovores is provided completely declassified, this campaign does not contain any Human-Xenovore conspiracy fodder. The Human Civil War is where any and all spy or conspiracy campaigns belong.

Chapter Nine - The GM's Vault. This contains answers to a very few number of the secrets and rumors from the first part of the book. While it answers some things, it leaves a lot open. This allows the GM to answer many of the questions raised as they see fit in their game, leaving the setting nice and open.

Chapter Ten - The Xenovores, The GM's Knowledge. This chapter provides the history of the Xenovores in detail, in case you want to use that information in the campaign. It also provides detailed information on their society, Package Deals for the various castes, and the politics of the Xenovore Empire and how it affected their side of the war with Humanity. All this is provided to the GM has a behind the scenes look at what's going on with the Alien Threat so they can adjust things as they see fit. It still leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

Chapter Eleven - Alien Wars Campaigns. Part One is Gamemastering Advice, some generalized advice on how to run a grim Military Style Campaign, when to keep and ditch "realism" and most importantly how to adapt the History of what happened in the setting to keep in uncertain. Campaign Ideas provides eleven complete ideas from various points in the century for full fledged Campaigns, or if you're feeling ambitious ideas for story arcs in a campaign encompassing the entire war. Each Campaign Idea comes with a summary of the campaigns main parameters and three major plot seeds to use.

The Downside:

There isn't a lot that was left out of the setting that one could ask for. If I were to want anything more it would be more extensive details on exactly how the Military Supply Chain works, both in theory and practice, at various points in the century. But the setting is open enough that too much detail like that would interfere with creating your own Campaign out of the book.

Maybe a few NPC write-ups to help get a GM started in creating a campaign as well.

The Otherside:

The majority of the book is presented completely without Hero System information, making it extremely easy to adapt the premise to any Game System you want to use. As a grim and dark future war setting it does an excellent job.

With several distinct styles of campaign presented you can use this for several different kinds of Military Sci-Fi Campaign, from front line warfare, espionage during the Human Civil War, a desperate fight for survival as the Xenovores threaten to take Earth itself, or a Space Navy campaign fighting the Xenovore fleets.

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