

Sample file

What's All This?



Introduction

The year is 1899, and ether has once more captivated the world. The gossamer substance, which carries light through the otherwise empty void of space, has pervaded scientific research for almost half a century. All of the most modern theories about heat, electricity, magnetism, and even gravity center on this mysterious, omnipresent energy field that lay hidden, undetectable, beneath the layers of gas, liquid, and visible solid matter.

Since its initial conceptualization mid-century, excitement about the mysterious substance only grew. Then, in 1874, Thomas Edison entered the picture, staging a publicity stunt that wowed the public and dominated the newspapers. If ether existed between planets, he claimed, then he could use it to traverse the expanse of space. In a dramatic display, a balloon lifted a flying craft to the very outward reaches of the atmosphere and into the unfettered ether, where it engaged an engine to propel it to Mars.

The journey was a success, and proved not only the viability of travel through ether, but also that Mars was home to an ancient civilization. Astronomers on Earth went wild. Many had spent years looking through telescopes, staring at what appeared to be ancient canals on the planet's surface, and speculating that such a civilization *must* exist. The confirmation was revolutionary.

The excitement led to a scramble toward other worlds, in search of the treasures they might hold. Most prized among the newly discovered resources was the Martian liftwood, a plant that stymied gravity and could be used to construct flying ships. Inspired by the graceful Martian cloudships, humans developed a panoply of vessels—ranging from ironclad aerial gunboats to stately ether-fliers designed to journey between planets without balloon assistance.

However, the vigorous colonial powers of Earth quickly overwhelmed both the precarious, dilapidated regimes of Mars and the clans of primeval Venus.

This human golden age of exploration and conquest reached its apex in the year 1889. The British Empire had holdings that touched every continent on Earth—and ranged to every planet inside the asteroid belt. The powerful nations of Earth, collectively called the Terrestrial Powers, vigorously snatched up holdings on other worlds, capitalizing on their extraordinary riches and resources. As they conquered and explored the inner worlds, humans began to hungrily eye faraway Jupiter and the worlds beyond.

Suddenly, the ether just... shifted. Once a magnificent source of new opportunities, it now became a deadly trap. Ether-fliers began to crash and disappear without explanation. Cut off from Earth, off-world colonies found their strength crumbling. Communication between the planets diminished, alliances shifted, and scattered wars of opportunity created chaos.

Now, after a decade or so of upheaval, the ether seems to be stabilizing. Explorers can once again launch out into the unknown. But what has become of the different worlds? And what new discoveries are waiting to be uncovered? The journey may be dangerous, but with a good Crew at your back, you intend to find out.



A Game of Imagination

Space 1889: After is a role-playing game: a cooperative venture between a group of players and a *Referee*. The players each create and control one character and interact with the game world through that character's experiences, based on their decisions and a healthy dose of luck. The Referee describes the game world and acts out the roles of everyone the characters meet.

Everyone is invested in the experience as a whole—not just in the fortunes of their own characters. There's no single winner of the game. Instead, the overall goal is to have fun and uncover the mysteries of the game setting. The individual victories and tragedies that unfold for the characters along the way are all part of this greater narrative of discovery and exploration. The story is a product of the players' interactions with one another and with the rules.

Since fun is the goal, you might reasonably wonder why game rules are necessary at all, especially when those rules may lead to horrible mishaps for the characters, including failure or death. Game rules exist to set expectations and allow everyone to participate on equal footing. They set the internal logic of the world—after all, there must be odds to beat if the heroes are expected to beat them. And if something doesn't work out, perhaps it's not the end of the story, but rather the perilous middle of a grand tale, still on its way toward a triumphant conclusion!

INDISPENSABLE MATERIALS

Playing *Space 1889: After* requires slightly more than just imagination. Before you begin, gather the following materials (in addition to this book):

- **Player's Handbook:** a copy of the 5th edition Player's Handbook, which contains the basic rules for character creation and combat.

1889 OR 1899?

You may wonder why, if the game is called *Space 1889: After*, the action takes place in the year 1899, instead?

Space 1889 is the title of the game line, named for the year in which Victorian space travel achieved its greatest heights. The original version of this game was set during the year 1889, and for more than thirty years players have explored that setting. Now, it's time to see what happens next. This forward jump is not unprecedented. A line of novels under the banner *Space 1889 and Beyond* explored events as late as 1892. *Space 1889: After* likewise begins by examining the events of 1899, and may progress into the new century and beyond.

It's also of note that the original *Space 1889* title was a playful reference to the *Space 1999* television show. By its second season, the show was referencing events 600 days after the first episode, and clearly no longer taking place in the year 1999, despite its title. In other words, the name is less about the exact year and more about the spirit of the game. There's no need to get into these details with new players unless they ask or need to relate to historical events.

While *Space 1889: After* exists in alternate history, the passage of time tends to nudge events back onto their normal course. The major powers may now have magical airships, but the Ottoman Empire still withdrew from Crete in 1898 (unless it somehow becomes important to your game that it didn't). Discovering the similarities and differences between historical events and those in *Space 1889: After* is part of the exploration the game offers.

Likewise, if you wish to set the clock back and relive daring exploits during the year 1889 itself, feel free to do so! The rules serve either way, but the new setting material is updated for the year 1899.



Empyrean Society
See Page 94

- **Dice:** A standard set of polyhedral dice injects random chance into the game. It's best if each player has their own set of dice.
- **Writing Materials:** You'll need a pen or pencil and paper to record events, changing conditions, and critical information during the game in a format where both the Referee and other players can easily reference it. The digital equivalents of these note-taking supplies are acceptable, so long as the information remains accessible to everyone. Relying on an impeccable memory won't suffice. We also recommend a printed copy of the *character sheet*.
- **Players:** Yourself and one or more interested parties who wish to play the game. One player must assume the role of Referee. The game works best with four players and one Referee, but any number of players is theoretically possible—though more than six becomes increasingly impractical.

OPTIONAL MATERIALS

In addition to the absolutely indispensable items above, the following items may enhance your gameplay but aren't strictly necessary:

- **Maps:** Hand-drawn or printed maps that show the scale and positions of game environment features add engagement and help improve everyone's understanding of the situation.
- **Miniatures:** Some form of marker to note each character's position on a map provides the same interest and clarity the map does. Using detailed miniature representatives of the characters adds a fun level of personalization.
- **Tokens:** You may want to use tokens to represent temporary conditions instead of constantly noting and erasing them on paper.

The Setup

Each player creates and plays a member of the *Empyrean Society*, an interplanetary community of explorers, scientists, traders, and soldiers who travel between the inner worlds. Individuals of any nationality, gender, species, or creed are welcome in the Society. The only requirements for membership are that you must have journeyed into the ether, however briefly, and you accept the society's charter mission of traveling in the name of discovery rather than exploitation.

Empyreans are an eclectic group of inventors, sailors, the wealthy, and the displaced. The players band together as a Crew and embark on exciting adventures.

A typical Crew can expect to do any or all of the following:

- ☐ Battle extremists—or choose a side and battle everyone else.
- ☐ Build fantastic machines out of extraordinary materials.
- ☐ Journey through the colorful and dangerous ether between the worlds.
- ☐ Mingle with alien civilizations and learn their motivations and secrets.
- ☐ Survive the harsh deserts, jungles, and icy wilds of the inner worlds.
- ☐ Uncover the ancient mysteries that tie distant worlds together.

This book assumes familiarity with the basics of 5th Edition, and most elements of gameplay are identical. Unless otherwise stated, items and rules function as described in the SRD.

There are many “dials” in these mechanics you can tweak to suit different styles of play; the Referee has unmitigated authority to make changes to anything they consider conducive to the intended style of play. New elements to the 5th Edition rules, which we detail and explain later in this book, include the following:

- ☐ No magic. Items, spells, classes, class features, etc., that rely on magic are removed or altered.
- ☐ New Backgrounds based on *Space 1889: After Careers*

- ❑ Stat blocks for air vehicles and new creatures
- ❑ Rules for aerial combat
- ❑ Re-worked Arcana and Medicine skills to embrace a sci-fi setting
- ❑ Rules for space travel
- ❑ Rules, feats, and properties for the widespread use of firearms
- ❑ *Space 1889: After* equipment adapted to 5e
- ❑ Approved 5e Classes and Archetypes that fit the setting
- ❑ Approved races ("species" in *Space 1889: After*)
- ❑ Units—individual NPCs fighting as groups with shared HP pools

Conflicts

Clashes and action are at the center of any great story. *Space 1889: After* has no shortage of dastardly villains to defeat, but the largest challenges come from ideological conflicts.

Three struggles propel the characters through their adventures: the contradiction between efficient technological progress and individual freedoms, the fragile balance between "civilized" manners and devastating war, and the dissonance between the Victorian mindset and the more modern views on Mars.

As a group, the players must grapple with these conflicts and determine for themselves where they stand. Crew members may each have different answers, but that doesn't mean they can't coexist and cooperate. Disagreements could lead to some spirited discussions or character development—also known as role-playing!

PROGRESS VS. FREEDOM

Works of Victorian science fiction share an unfettered optimism about technological progress, an optimism the authors themselves relinquished after the horrors of the Great War—now known as World War I. Science and industry could make anything possible, including horrible abominations.

If the efficient use of resources improves the quality of life for everyone, is it worth sacrificing your ethics in the name of the

greater good? On the other hand, what good is technology if you end up an exploited slave to create and maintain it?

Blood is the ultimate price of Freedom, and bondage is the ultimate price of Progress. Individual characters and entire factions struggle with this duality, and it weighs particularly heavily on inventors.

Anarchists represent the extreme embodiment of Freedom. They aim to eliminate the monarchies of the *Terrestrial Powers* and ensure liberty on all the worlds, but they're willing to kill as many innocent people as necessary to do it. No matter how charitable or benevolent an aristocrat may be, Anarchists see only a crown that must be eliminated.

Meanwhile, the *Masters of Energy* represent the opposite extreme for Progress. They are cold and ruthless in their pursuit of a technological utopia. War, they believe, is a waste of resources, but so is art. Everyone has a role within the machine. If they don't participate, they are an excess that needs to be managed.

Both of these forces may engage or entice the Crew, leaving characters to find their own paths between the extremes, or make ever greater sacrifices to one altar or the other.

MANNERS VS. WAR

Space 1889's original description was "science fiction role-playing in a more civilized time." Civility and savagery coexist in every culture in the game.

The question the players must face is how they intend to conduct their own business—do they use subtle diplomacy or fierce violence? As with the other conflicts, the answer is seldom entirely one or the other. Rather, circumstances force both approaches. Tea room gossip may be just as dangerous and interesting as a lancer charge. Which battlefield does your character choose?

There's still an upper class in charge of every planet, and even a Victorian bigot is forced to put more stock in class than race. A Venusian chief and a Martian prince are both still royalty; if they are to have any influence in the halls of power, characters must be able to acquit themselves without embarrassing themselves or their Crew.

Anarchists
See Page 117

Terrestrial Powers
See Page 114

Masters of Energy
See Page 118



VICTORIAN ATTITUDES VS. MODERN ATTITUDES

Victorian Virtue	Victorian Vice	Modern Virtue	Modern Vice
Conviction	Naivete	Sophistication	Corruption
Courage	Inflexibility	Flexibility	Despair
Detachment	Cruelty	Kindness	Hysteria
Dignity	Bigotry	Tolerance	Decadence
Duty	Compliance	Independence	Discord
Improvement	Meddling	Sensitivity	Stagnation
Industry	Exploitation	Generosity	Waste
Optimism	Arrogance	Understanding	Cynicism

Despite the trappings of civility, an unquestionable streak of brutality and savagery exists on all worlds—especially on Earth. You cannot always fight evils like slavery with strongly worded oratory or charity drives alone, and dangerous beasts will trample or consume you whether you're wearing the correct seasonal fashions or not. Violence has its place.

Both brutality and charm are valid aspects of the game. Different characters within the Crew may disagree about which approach to use in a specific situation, and occasionally they may find that there is only one viable choice.

VICTORIAN ATTITUDES VS. MODERN ATTITUDES

Players can't help but bring their own modern mindsets to the gaming table, and those become lenses through which they view their Victorian era characters. It can be fun—or horrifying—to see the world through their less-jaded eyes.

To help get a feel for the Victorian mentality, take a moment to look at the table of Virtues and Vices. Victorians are—on the whole—energetic, optimistic, and oh-so-proud. But every Virtue they admire has a darker side: a Vice they fall into when left untempered.

For example, the same Victorian enthusiasm for social progress that destroyed the institution of slavery also propelled colonial atrocities across the globe.

The opposed modern mindset has its own Virtues, each of which has its own extreme Vice, as well. The Martians' alien psychology is much closer to that of the real world today. They endured centuries of turmoil, wars, plagues, and climate change. If a player is having a hard time grasping the Victorian attitude, just assume the views of the Martians affected their character's outlook and they're well ahead of their time.

The clash of these attitudes, and discovering the point at which a Virtue becomes Vice, is a personal journey for each character. Where does the character exist on the spectrum, and what might it take to push them toward one side or the other? Examining this mental space is as much a part of the exploration of the world as the act of mapping continents on distant worlds.

However, this conflict isn't an excuse to overplay Vices. Everyone at the gaming table must feel welcome and be able to have fun. If an expression of a Vice (or even a Virtue) would disrupt that, you should consider other ways to express your character's development or have a conversation with the other players about what they're comfortable with. After all, it's hard to hold strictly to historical authenticity in a world with steam-powered spaceships.

In *Space 1889: After*, the mixture of values created by humans interacting with Martians has already transformed the basic attitudes of the time in some significant ways. The structure of the Empyrean Society itself is a reflection of such changes. A club accepting women—and members of lower social castes—was

practically unthinkable in this era in the real world. Wearing corsets on the outside of your clothes, which is the current fashion in this world's Paris thanks to Martian influence, was, as well.

Using this Book

Sound like fun? Let's get started! First, you'll need to create a character to play. The next few chapters introduce the species, backgrounds, and equipment unique to this setting.

The **EMPYREAN SOCIETY HANDBOOK** in Chapter 4 is a valuable resource for players, as it describes what's currently known about the solar system. A player with a well-traveled character should pay special attention to this section. However, as the Crew explores other worlds, they may find that their actual experiences conflict with the Handbook. Players should be prepared to update their records as their characters explore! Those with less-traveled characters can ignore this chapter—their fellows can fill them in as they go.

Following the Handbook are a few more specialized rules. There's a chapter for vehicles, which anyone playing a Captain or pilot should read. Then, there are circumstantial rules for travel, as well as an explanation of the various threats adventurers may encounter. The Referee should take a peek here, but everyone else can ignore these rules until they're relevant. The Referee's section is filled with advice, tips, and tricks specific to that role. Players can read about it if they like, and may even learn how to make their Referee's job a little easier!

The final section of this book outlines two adventures to help your Crew get into the action right away. These are designed to help new Referees grow accustomed to running the game. Each adventure takes the Referee through the necessary rules for the story one layer at a time to make running the game easy and accessible.

Players absolutely shouldn't read the adventures, lest they spoil the surprises waiting ahead!

COLONIALISM

Colonial conquest is at the heart of Victorian era politics, and any game set during that time—even one with spaceships and aliens—can't ignore it. Even ignoring it would be taking a position on it.

The attitude this text takes is that colonial conquests happened. Atrocities happened. But exploration and the establishment of new settlements—especially in harsh environments or on distant worlds—isn't inherently wicked. While exploiting or conquering an existing people is certainly wrong, sometimes disrupting an existing society may seem justifiable—especially if that society relies upon the exploitation or slavery of a group of people. Players may have to wrestle with how their characters react to such societies, and we encourage you to use this opportunity to reflect upon the values and morality involved. In some cases, the characters may have the ability to disrupt these societies. Technological superiority is one factor, but you should not discount the agency of the discontented and exploited. The arrival of outsiders may provide an opening for necessary social change, and new colonialists, however bad, may seem better than the scoundrels currently in power. Characters may nonetheless find themselves in the middle of the turmoil. The arrival of explorers—even well-intentioned ones—often leaves a civilization open to plunder.

This game's intent is to seldom engage with the act of colonizing directly, but to acknowledge its inevitable effects on the in-game worlds. The characters are free to be a part of the system or to fight it. The Martians are, in many ways, a representation of our modern selves. What would these Victorian explorers, colonists, and conquerors make of us? How might we act if we were in their shoes today?