

Starblade Echoes

A 24 Hour Game

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Intro

Starblade Echoes is a space opera/fantasy, inspired by comics such as Rom the Spaceknight, the various Ultraman manga series, and anime like Tekkaman or Tekkaman Blade. The players take the roles of Spaceknights, undertaking missions from High Command to protect the people and planets of United Human Space from the Ningar. One player takes the role of gamemaster (GM), who creates the missions, as well as the other characters who the Spaceknights encounter on their travels.

Gameplay Overview

Players take the roles of the Spaceknights, describing their choices, dialogue and actions. The GM takes the role of the Supporting Characters, describing their choices, dialogue and actions. Everyone contributes to making up details for the game world through play, whether it's bits of history made up on the spot ("Remember when the Blackhole Ravens won the ball game?") to bits of technobabble for the sake of color ("That's a T8-31C, you don't see those flying around anymore!").

Each session revolves around a Mission given by the High Command to the Spaceknights to fulfill, which always entails protecting the colonies, keeping the peace, and fighting the Ningar. During the mission, the Spaceknights will encounter the various personal and political problems of the local people and be forced to deal (or not deal) with that as well.

During play, people will make Conflict Rolls to work towards resolving the Mission and/or the Drama. Although the Spaceknights are supposed to try their best to complete their missions, sometimes they will fail, or find out that something else is more important.

Dice

This game uses normal 6-sided dice, like you can find in most boardgames. You'll need probably around 10 in total.

Setting

War

It was something like 200 years ago when the Ningar first entered human space. They had initially raided a few outlying ships, and it was a year later that they returned and raided an entire colony. Their technology was superior- what they needed was us. Somehow, they developed a way to use the life force of sentient beings to warp from system to system. Before they were simply using their own- but now, they had a perfect replacement, an alien species that was even more powerful than their own for such a purpose.

Raids and assaults came quick and fierce, and we lost nearly a third of our outlying worlds. We adapted their technology, creating our own fighters, better weapons and even Battlesuits. Our jump technology was might not have had the range theirs did, but then again, we weren't burning through living beings like cheap batteries after each jump either.

Still, it was a losing battle. They took their breeding numbers who were originally to be sacrificed to space jumps and turned them into warriors... We were playing catch up with a technology we didn't understand.

The Starblade Experiment

While researching their life force technology, Dr. Stacey Lee-Mendoza theorized that it might be possible to reverse the process- to take normal energy and improve a person's life force. Though at first she received little in the way of funding, once a few of the more wealthy got word it might extend one's life or keep one young and healthy, suddenly the funding came flooding in. Lee-Mendoza found herself pushing her idea faster and further than anyone could have imagined- in just 14 years, it went from theory, to the greatest discovery since the jump drive- the Starblade Effect.

The process was inefficient, it needed massive amounts of energy, but it was possible to completely break the laws of physics for a living being. It required all the energy of a single star- infused into one human.

What it created, was a superhuman, the first space knight. He no longer needed to eat, sleep, drink or breath, he could withstand space without a problem, even fly under some kind of telekinetic propulsion, produce energy beams, forcefields, throw asteroids and rip through spaceship hulls. It was the turning point in the war.

The Spaceknights

Since then, the Starblade Effect has been utilized repeatedly to produce the Spaceknights, mankind's best defense against the Ningar. Wielding weapons forged from the remains of the very star that produced them, the Spaceknights patrol and protect the many worlds of United Human Space. You are one of them.

United Human Space

Usually simply shortened to the "Worlds", United Human Space is a federation of thousands of different individual planetary, star system, or star cluster governments. Each system has a Guardian Force, a federal defense force to protect the system, prevent piracy, and quell attempts at secession or rebellion. Each Guardian Force varies in funding, numbers, equipment and experience. Some are using the newest fighters and battlesuits (such as coreworld systems, or vital trade ports), while others are using stuff over a century old...

Space Travel

Interplanetary trips take usually an hour or two. Intersystem jumps also take an hour or two, though the people onboard only feel a few moments pass. Jumps also take a few hours (3-4) of recovery time before a ship can do another. Faster than light communication also uses the same phenomenon as a warp jump, so most ships send and receive their messages just prior and post a Jump. Sending/receiving communications without an actual jump still taxes the engine the same way.

Spaceships either dock at spacestations and then enter atmospheres, send down smaller shuttles, or land directly, depending on their build and the docking facilities planetside.

Spaceships use energy weapons and missiles, though no forcefields have been developed. Close range combat is held with fighters, bombers, and battlesuits while larger bombardments are held by the capital ships.

Spaceknights

Spaceknights are the elites of the human defense forces. They are chosen for their exceptional willpower and aptitude. They no longer age, they can fly in space unsuited, and can have fist fights with spaceships. They are gods compared to humans. Though a single spaceknight can be the equivalent of a small fleet, instead of isolating them, the Worlds' Defense Forces usually assigns them to small squads and uses them to quickly and surgically deal with problems. It is truly a terrifying situation if you see more 8 or more in the same area.

Each Spaceknight is given a weapon made from the husk of the star that birthed them. Usually it's a massive sword, a Starblade, though other weapons exist, such as spears, boomerangs, maces or chains. Each Spaceknight also can summon up a forcefield to defend his or her self, or even entire spacestations. Such fields give off unique effects- "Sigils" as it were.

The Ningar

The Ningar have found humans to be the most efficient form of fuel ever. A small ship can jump at the price of merely 3 or 4 human lives, while larger ones take dozens. The largest motherships might eat hundreds of lives just to jump through space.

At first the Ningar focused on raids depending on firepower, which they won. Once the Spaceknights entered the picture, the Ningar changed their tactics to quick raids, mostly on small settlements rather than fully populated planets. It was easier to get a small force in and out before the humans could respond than to do large raids all at once.

For the last 50 years, the Ningar have also switched tactics to include getting human spies, agents, and other traitors to help them. They are able to perform miracles such as curing any disease, bringing the recently dead back to life, or to grant their own form of a "Spaceknight" process on humans (of course, instead of using the power of a star, it uses the entire population of a planet...). The Ningar are totally willing to carry through such bargains for humans who are willing to pass along vital information such as military or settlement locations, as well as things such as security codes to deactivate planetary defenses. And, as always, there's always someone willing to take the deal.

Unfortunately for the Ningar, and fortunately for us, they have not found a way to drain or use Spaceknights for their lifeforce.

Rules

Space Knight Character Creation

- 1) Name the star that gave its life so you could fight the Ningar. Add as much or as little detail as you'd like about that.
- 2) Who was your Knight before the Starblade process? What motivated your knight to undergo it?
- 3) Describe your Knight, his or her armor, and special weapon.
- 4) Create a Sigil for your Knight. A sigil can be an animal or mythological creature (Snake, Griffon, Dragon, etc.), a symbolic icon (An eye, the Sun, a tree, etc.), or a shape. A sigil is never words.
- 5) Choose 3 Vows.
- 6) Name any other player's Knight, explain how he or she has earned your Knight's respect and/or friendship, whether it is known by the other Knight or not.
- 7) As a group, all the players should come up with a name and concept for their spaceship that they travel around in. Make it fun- think of it the same way you'd have a car for a roadtrip- it's character that matters.

Vows

Vows are promises your Spaceknight made to his or herself, not necessarily out loud. Vows should begin with "I will always" or "I will never" and should always deal with the Spaceknight's relationship to a greater ideal or else other people. B-movie stuff like "I will never be defeated" or "I will always fight the Ningar" ought to be tossed out. After extended play, if you and your group ok it- it makes sense to change Vows as the characters change.

Examples:

- I will never turn my back on my friends
- I will never let a plea for help go unanswered
- I will always uphold the law
- I will never let another person get "juiced" by the Ningar if

I can help it.
-I will make up for my past
-I will always carry my weight

GM Prep:

- 1) Mission - detail the specifics of what needs to be done, and complications
- 2) Drama – detail a secondary problem, having to do with Worlds' citizens.
- 3) Supporting Cast – detail 3-5 characters who all have motivations with regards to the Mission, the Plea for help, or both.
- 4) Mission Rank starts at 1, Drama Rank starts at 1

Missions

Before each session, the GM needs to create a Mission. A Mission is a set of objectives given to the Space Knights from High Command, which defines the goals of the session.

Missions are built by choosing one choice from the Objectives, the Targets, and the Complications, and add whatever details sound fun.

Objectives

Find/Get
Transport
Protect
Destroy
Stop

Target

A Base/Space Station/Spaceship/A fleet
A Spy/Agent/Scientist/Leader
Settlers/Refugees/Researchers/Civilians
Supplies/Fuel/Parts
A Space Knight

Complications

Sensors and communications impaired
Countdown before disaster
Hostile Environment
Bad Intel
Hostile Government/Population
Bigger Problem

Example Missions:

Find the Ningar Spy
(Find-Spy-Hostile Population)

One of the Worlds' secret shipyards was destroyed by a surprise attack in this system. Someone leaked this information to the Ningar, and it's one of the high politicians. The problem is that the locals have been

always rather independent, and see the Worlds' and the Space Knights as tyrants stepping on their sovereignty... Elections are coming up, if the spy gets into one of the higher offices, they'll be able to reveal even more info, perhaps even surrendering the whole system to the Ningar...

Destroy a Rogue Space Knight
(Destroy- Space Knight- Countdown before disaster)

One of your own has turned to the Ningar, and sold an entire planet for power. He's holding the planet hostage, destroying any vessels that try to escape while his Ningar allies send a collection fleet to raid the planet. You must destroy him so that the civilians can escape before the fleet arrives.

Regain Control of the Research Station
(Get-Space Station-Hostile Population)

Miners and technicians have taken control of a research station, holding the place hostage until their demands for better working conditions are met. Unfortunately, the research station also produces key parts to the Starblade Process, and we can't make anymore Knights until it is in operation again... Any further delays could leave all of the Worlds open for invasion...

Drama

Aside from the official mission, the GM also creates a secondary conflict, one based around the people and the community the Knights will come into contact with during the Mission. The Drama should be a conflict designed to provoke and test the Spaceknights Vows. It's also best if the Drama works as a serious complication to the Mission itself- creating a secondary but important goal to fulfill.

Example Drama

Popularity Contest

While the Mission is to stop a Ningar assault fleet upon a critical star system, political conflict is occurring within the system. The current Guardian made a tough decision to sacrifice an outer moon in the last battle which has earned a lot of criticism from the population. Many support a younger, more popular man to replace him as Head Guardian. The politicking and infighting has caused a division in the defense forces, and is leaving the whole system less able to deal with the oncoming fleet...

The Cure

The Mission is to evacuate the planet, yet a team of dedicated researchers are very close to developing a cure to a plague that threatens to eventually kill of their entire people. The cure has taken decades of research, and they need just a ... little more time...

Mission & Drama Rank

The core mechanic of The Starblade Effect is the Mission Rank & Drama Rank. Each session revolves around resolving one or both of these. The rank for each respectively measures how close the Spaceknights are to resolving either one, and how difficult it will be to take the next step forward in doing so. Both start at 1, and end at 5. When a conflict arises around either the Mission or the Drama, and it happens to be at Rank 5, a successful Conflict resolves the situation entirely.

Supporting Cast

If you have both the Mission and the Drama, it should be pretty easy to come up with 3-8 extra characters to serve as supporting cast. These characters should be key in supporting or conflicting the resolution of either the Mission or the Drama. Give the supporting cast names, descriptions, personality quirks, and most importantly, a motivation- what they want from this whole thing. It'd also be good to consider what they'd be willing to do to make sure it happens.

Gameplay

Mission Briefing

Each session begins with a Mission Briefing, which is an overview of the Mission the GM has prepared. The information is received just before jumping from the last system (and it also gives the coordinates of where to jump to), and is a prerecorded message with the data included. This means that the Spaceknights get a bit of info, but can't really ask questions from High Command who sent it, at least for another 3-4 hours... It should include what the objectives are, who the Spaceknights will need to talk to (usually anyone in the Guardian Force and/or local government officials), and what the situation was as High Command last heard (maybe only a few hours ago, maybe days or weeks even).

Scene Framing

The GM is responsible for setting up scenes for action to occur, cutting and glossing over stuff that has no real interest. The players can make suggestions for cool scenes, and the GM can use those as well. The only requirement is that scenes should end shortly after any Conflict (see below).

The first two scenes are also special- one must highlight the Mission, and if possible, show off the Complication, and the other must highlight the Drama. After that, all scenes are fair game.

Assigning Relationships

Any player can assign a Relationship with any Supporting

Character to their Spaceknight with the GM's permission. A relationship means there's an emotional connection- friendship, love, respect, hate, trust, bitterness, something, between the two.

This ought to grow naturally out of the events in play, though it's in the player's best interest to form Relationships quickly in play. A Relationship can also be with a group of people, such as an entire community- "Hero amongst the Winderbelt Crew" or whatever works.

Free Narration

A good deal of play uses free narration- a player says what they want their Spaceknight to do, and it happens. The GM says what the Supporting Characters do, and it happens. When a player and the GM both agree that things ought to be more complicated, that it ought to come at some cost- then it's a Conflict.

Conflict

Set the Stakes

Everyone who has a character involved in the conflict should work out what's at Stake- what happens if the conflict is won, what happens if it is lost.

You cannot put up for Stake anything that would resolve the Mission or the Drama (before they hit Rank 5). You cannot put up for Stake any Supporting Character's life, or anything that would remove a Spaceknight from being able to participate in the mission for this session (which includes death, being bedridden for weeks, etc.).

Determine Difficulty

The Difficulty is the number of successes need to beat the Conflict. If the Conflict does with the resolution of the Mission or the Drama, use the appropriate Rank as the Difficulty. If it has to do with neither, the Difficulty is 1.

Dice

Each player who is participating narrates how their Starknight is attempting to undertake and win the Conflict. The GM hands them 1-3 dice depending on how much he or she liked the Narration. If any Vows apply, the player also gets 4 more dice.

Successes

The players roll their dice. Each 5 or 6 counts as a success. If the total number of Successes amongst ALL of the Starknights participating adds up to enough to pass the Difficulty, the Conflict is won. If not, the players can choose to Call in Help for a couple of extra dice...

Calling in Help

Any of the Relationships may be Called in for Help, in which that player receives an extra die to roll. If the player takes any Harm from this conflict, the Relationship suffers the same level of Harm as well. Multiple Relationships may be Called in.

Success/Failure

If the players succeed, then the conflict is won. If the Conflict revolved around the Mission or Drama, the appropriate Rank rises by 1, accordingly. If the Rank was 5, either the Mission or the Drama is resolved. If the players failed, Ranks stay at the same number.

Harm

Regardless of whether the Conflict is won or lost, each player should compare their individual rolled successes against the Difficulty. If they have enough to meet the Difficulty alone- they suffer no Harm. If they do not, they have to make a Harm Check.

Harm Check

When making a Harm check the player rolls the base dice they had without Calling in Help. Take the lowest number that comes up, and that's the Harm they suffer. If they Called in Help, all of those Supporting Characters suffer that level of Harm as well. The player may choose which Characters get Bumped to worse Harm.

Taking the Hit

Alternately, the player may choose to have a Supporting Character Take the Hit. Choose a Relationship your character has that hasn't been used for Calling in Help, and they take the full brunt of the Harm instead of your Spaceknight.

Narration

The player whose character took the worst Harm gets to narrate. If it's tied, then the GM gets final narration.

Followup Conflicts

If you failed, but still want to try, as long as you haven't taken a "6" Harm (incapacitated), you may continue to make Followup Conflicts in this scene.

Harm

During play, both Spaceknights and Supporting Characters will come to suffer Harm, which is negative effects ranging from physical injury, being emotionally crushed, or socially outcasted. Really, any sort of bad thing that effects your life can be considered Harm.

Harm to your Spaceknight

During Conflicts, your Spaceknight will suffer Harm, which is tracked on the Chart below. Each player has their own Harm Chart for their Spaceknight.

When you take Harm, put a checkmark, or a token, next to the appropriate number. So if you took 4 Harm, you'd check off 4. If the number is already filled, mark the next higher number. So if you took another 4 Harm, instead 5 would take the mark. The effects listed next to the number are suffered, and they are cumulative.

After each conflict (whether your Spaceknight was involved or not) each mark "slides" to a lower number, and when they slide off "1", the mark is gone. So, if you had a 4 and 5 Harm level mark, they both would then become a 3 and 4 on the next scene.

1	-1 die to this Scene
2	-1 die to this Scene
3	-1 die to this Scene
4	-1 die to all Conflicts
5	-1 die to all Conflicts
6	Incapacitated (no more Conflicts this Scene)

Harm to Supporting Characters

Supporting Characters do not get their own Harm Charts, they all share a single one. When a Supporting Character suffers Harm, simply write their name down on the chart next to the number and they suffer the indicated effects.

A Supporting Character can only occupy one level of the Harm Chart, so if they suffer further Harm, move their name up if it is more Harm, leave it where it is if it is less Harm. Just like the Spaceknights chart- if a slot is filled, it goes to the next available higher number.

The Supporting Characters also drop 1 Rank for each conflict that occurs, whether they are involved or not.

1	Wounded
2	Wounded
3	Wounded
4	Incapacitated, cannot be Called on for Help
5	Incapacitated, cannot be Called on for Help
6	Dead or removed from the situation(in a bad way) (Supporting character is removed from play)

Healing Harm

Healing Harm is a Conflict. If the person being healed is a Supporting Character, they automatically Take the Hit, if any Harm comes from the Conflict. The Difficulty is equal to the Rank being Healed up. Success automatically removes that level of Harm.

Endgame

Most groups will want to end the game after the Mission is

complete, or the Drama, or both. Endgame may also happen if the group decides the Spaceknights have totally lost this one, and better just run and call it a day.

Epilogue

One or more players may take part in the Epilogue, which is some sort of quick scene where the characters reflect or say something about how they felt about the Mission and the events that transpired.