

Campaign Advantages: Prospectors have a lot of autonomy, and the campaign can have lots of gritty hard-SF details. Dangerous work and rough company can provide action, but it's likely to be small-scale conflict suitable for a group of PCs.

Campaign Disadvantages: The Game Master needs to work up a star system in some detail if the characters are going to spend time searching for wealth. Characters without their own ship will be at the mercy of whatever mining company controls the best rocks. Game Masters have to make sure the characters can make a living, by adjusting the chance of finding something of value and setting the market price accordingly.

References: Larry Niven's "Known Space" stories; Poul Anderson's *Tales of the Flying Mountains*.

THE ABSURDIST CAMPAIGN

If life on Earth is incomprehensible and sometimes blackly comic, how much worse might a galactic empire be? Absurdist SF is often satirical, but an absurdist space campaign is usually an excuse for straightforward humor, from simple silliness to more subtly bizarre.

Character Roles: Innocents abroad – possibly highly capable on their own world, but in galactic society they are but motes caught up in chaos, not even able to go to the male mammalian biped's room without a guidebook. The being with an angle – someone who (thinks it) sees a profit to be made from the situation. Characters from other campaign types, twisted to suit.

Things to Do: Get home; rebuild home; buy a nice quiet planet; find out who's behind it all; make a documentary; become emperor; find a decent cup of coffee; try to avoid trouble.

Campaign Advantages: Can go anywhere and take inspiration from anything (following classic clichés to absurd conclusions). The GM can rewrite galactic history and assign TLs to suit himself. Characters rarely die, except absurdly.

Campaign Disadvantages: Can go anywhere. Needs players and GM willing to improvise and not take any



of it too seriously. Boring if drawn out, so best used as light relief between episodes of a serious campaign.

References: Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*; Harry Harrison's *Bill*, *The Galactic Hero*; Terry Pratchett's Discworld books, *The Dark Side of the Sun*, and *Strata*; almost anything by Robert Sheckley or Jack Vance; *Lost in Space*; *Red Dwarf*; the campiest episodes of *Star Trek* and *Dr Who*.

Heroic Engineering

Science fiction is defined as stories about or involving science and technology, and so it's natural that a very old subgenre concentrates on stories about people engaged in large technology projects. This was once a central part of SF, but was gradually shoved aside by more adventure-oriented fiction. But it never died out completely. Stories of heroic engineering include Arthur C. Clarke's *The Fountains of Paradise*, about the construction of a space elevator, and parts of Kim Stanley Robinson's "Green Mars" series about terraforming Mars. In heroic engineering stories, the actual process of doing the job and overcoming the technical challenges are major themes rather than just background for drama.

In a *GURPS Space* adventure, heroic engineering can be an interesting alternative to blaster fights and space marketing. Tasks like designing a new starship or completing a space colony can be quite fascinating, even if they don't involve as much adrenaline. Engineering adventures do require players who are interested in coming up with their own equipment designs, using the rules for New Inventions (p. B473) or Gadgeteering (p. B475).

The Game Master can complicate matters with hidden flaws, industrial spies among the labor crew, sinister forces intent on stopping the project, and unforeseen expenses. Those problems can generate blaster fights and hovercraft chases to keep the non-engineer characters busy. However, it may be necessary for the Game Master and some players to do the actual design evaluation and skill rolls via e-mail rather than during game sessions, if other players are easily bored.

Construction

You don't get much more blue-collar than construction work, even if it's a thousand miles up in orbit. All those orbital stations, starships, space colonies, and whatnot don't build themselves (unless it's a game setting with advanced biotech and living spaceships, of course). The crews who do the work of building them can get into all kinds of interesting trouble.

As with prospecting, the work itself may be only a backdrop. The real fun comes when the workers face labor racketeers or corporate thugs, or when the colony they're working on suddenly declares itself independent and gets into a shooting war, or when it turns out someone on the shift is part of a smuggling ring. If the project includes asteroid mining for raw materials, then the work crews may spend part of their time as prospectors, which adds all those adventure possibilities.