IMPERIAL MEASURE

Social Science Fiction in the Outer Rim

Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.
- John 8:51

Welcome to the Empire

It is 27xx AD. Humanity is spread among the stars, stronger than ever, united under the firm and just hand of the Imperial Corps.

The Outer Rim Rebellion was crushed after the invention of the Lazarus Machine – a rapid cloning and consciousness transmitting device, now present on every planet and capital starship. The Lazarus Machine means immortality for every citizen of Imperial space. As long as you can pay the Imperial Measure – the net worth of your life, established by the impeccable judgment of the Imperial Corps.

The world of Imperial Measure is dominated by a huge intergalactic Empire, governed by an immortal bureaucracy known as the Imperial Corps.

All citizens of the Empire are constantly monitored, their actions weighed and measured by an anonymous Watcher. Anybody can live forever, but the cost of immortality is different and constantly shifting for every individual.

The simplest accepted understanding is that if a person behaves and acts as a productive member of society, any Imperial Citizen can earn their Imperial Measure within a lifetime, maybe even sooner than that (to minimize the negative impact of any unforeseen fatal accident).

Become a criminal or deviant and you had better make sure it's a worthwhile

endeavor -- the cost of your life will shoot through the roof, potentially sealing you to whatever fate strikes you in this incarnation.

So, before you do something you might regret, ask yourself – do you want to live forever? Well, do you, punk?

Life is a priceless treasure. Invest with the Imperial Corps!
- Imperial Propaganda

The First Session

To play a game of Imperial Measure, you will need the following:

- 4 to 6 players in total -- 1 Watcher and 3 to 5 Imperial Citizens
- Pencils
- Paper
- Several six-sided dice. 6 per player (including the Watcher) will be enough. Alternatively, a shared pool of 11 dice will be enough if you don't mind sharing.

One player will be the Watcher. The Watcher is a combination of an in-game character, assigned by the Empire to hand out tasks, monitor Citizens, and record their progress towards earning their Imperial Measure. It is also the Watcher's role to portray the various non-player characters, obstacles, and world of Imperial Measure.

The other three to five players are Imperial Citizens. Citizens are the protagonists of a game of Imperial Measure. The band of Citizens will be given difficult missions by the Watcher, then set out to complete them and earn their Imperial Measure.

Before getting started on character creation, get everybody together to talk about the setting. Reading the 'Welcome to the Empire' section is a good place to start.

Next, it is time to make some important decisions as a group about what your particular game setting will look like. As a group, discuss the following questions, then write down the answers on a piece of paper when you have made a consensus.

Is there extraterrestrial life?

If so, are the citizens of the Empire aware of it? Are there intelligent life forms? If so, how is their relationship with the Empire at the start of your story?

How is interstellar travel done?

Has the Empire discovered faster-than-light technology? If not, how is interstellar travel made manageable? Slow ships with stasis technology? Jump-gates between systems? Stabilized wormholes?

Are there Earth-like planets?

If so, are they natural? Terraformed? If there are not, where do Imperial Citizens live? Space stations? Hollowed-out asteroids? Carefully constructed habitats on otherwise uninhabitable planets?

What threats face the Empire?

Are shortages causing trouble for the Empire? Living space, farmland, fuel, personal liberties, and civil unrest in the face of an undying bureaucracy are some possible internal threats.

External threats might be astronomical events, such as the death of a star, or other civilizations (human or otherwise), disease, or a plague of self-replicating robots consuming all organic material in their path.

If for any reason a player is unhappy about an answer, talk it out. You have all

gathered to play a game together, so make sure it's going to be a good time for you and your friends.

Once the list is finalized, it is time to move on to character creation.

But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

- Isaiah 57:20

Character Creation

In a game of Imperial Measure, the players take on the the roles of elder Citizens of Imperial society. They might even remember the world as it was, before the creation of the Imperial Corps, without the tight norms of the Imperial Creed and the unblinking gaze of the Watchers. Having experienced several lifetimes within the hustle and bustle of the Core Worlds, they have moved outwards, settling into the new frontier of the Outer Rim.

Each Player Character is a Seventh Incarnation Imperial Citizen. With six lifetimes worth of experience each, these people have forgotten more than anyone learns in a life. To represent this, a Player Character is made out of past Careers and Memories.

Careers and Skills

Careers reflect a lifetime of professional experience. For each of a character's six lifetimes, they choose one of the following careers: Trooper, Spacer, Academic, or Diplomat.

A character may not have more than 3 lifetimes in a single Career. Eventually, you know all you can expect to know about a career path and decide to branch out.

For each Lifetime spent in a Career, choose one Skill from that Career.

Trooper Skills:
- Wetwork: This is the catch-all skill for killing or incapacitating foes on a personal scale. Firearms, melee weapons, and martial arts all fall under Wetwork.
- Stealth: Sneaking, hiding, and not making a sound. If you need to go unnoticed, Stealth is the skill.
- Heavy Weapons: Ship-to-ship weapons fire, vehicle-mounted weapons, mortars -- anything made to target an area and wipe out many people at once, all falls under Heavy Weapons.

Spacer Skills:

- Piloting: This skill is used for skillful maneuvering and navigation of vehicles. Land, sea, air and space are open to you.
- Engineering: This skill is used for mechanical and electrical engineering. If you need to make a gadget, crack a security system, or fix a ship's thrusters, this is the skill to use.
- Powered Armor: The Empire employs a variety of powered exoskeletons designed to allow superhuman feats of strength and agility. If you need to lift something huge, leap across a ravine, or punch through a wall, see if a suit of Powered Armor is available.

Academic Skills:
- Biology: This skill is used to learn about living things, including extraterrestrials. To figure out what came out of strange eggs and killed the colonists, or how to stop a rampaging giant bug, use biology.
- Medicine: This skill is for medical treatment of the injured. If you need to keep your witness talking for just a bit longer, or reset a friend's leg, use this skill.
- Chemistry: To create or identify explosive compounds, trace a deadly neurotoxin to its origin, or carefully sabotage a habitat's atmosphere, use chemistry.

Diplomat Skills:

- Persuasion: To convince somebody to help you, use persuasion. This covers winning over somebody's trust, getting them to put down a gun, or to listen to you for just a moment longer while your buddy with a sniper rifle up on the hill lines up the perfect shot.
- Trade: Trade is for acquiring things that you would not normally have easy access to -- the best ships, tickets to a sold-out show, or your last cigarette for a map out of a high-security prison.
- Clout: Bluster, political backing, and the ability to shout louder than the next guy. Clout is used to get people to back down, get the hell out of your way, or defer to you. It is a mixture of respect (earned or otherwise) and fear.

Memories

After choosing careers and their associated skills, the next element of character creation is Memories. For each lifetime that a character has lived, there is one important Memory that the character has carried along. They may (and likely do) remember other things, but a Memory is a truly special and defining moment of that lifetime.

Memories are a way for players to shape the world they will be playing in. As a player, the Memories you choose to write down signal to the other players that you are interested in a particular facet of the setting. You can introduce NPCs, locations,

activities, and other aspects of the world that you want to include in the game.

For his character's first Memory, a player should think of something that the character has carried along since the very start of this long, long life. An earliest childhood memory, a best friend, a favorite activity -- make it personal.

Keep running with this for each of the six lives. Think of what has stuck with each character as they have made their way through their careers within the Empire. Try to have at least one Memory that introduces your relationship with another player character -- having "Albrecht killed my dog" as a Memory that has stuck around since your second life is a pretty big deal!

Anybody who hasn't yet should think up a name at this point. When everybody is done with Skills and Memories, take time to introduce all of your characters. Talk about your Memories, what your characters look like, and who in the group they know. Get a feel for what the cast of protagonists is like.

Finally, think about a Goal for your character. Your Goal is what you are fighting for -- the grand reward you want out of your next lift. You are facing danger, possibly even a final death, so that the Empire will give you one more life and a shot at completing your Goal. It might be big, like overseeing the settling of a planet. It might be small, like settling down and having a non-cloned child to raise and show the galaxy. Make it something that is special

to you, a happy ending to work towards. Share your goal with the rest of the table.

Now, everybody pass your sheets to the Watcher. Watcher, look at the Memories, Careers, and Goals of your group. Think about where they intersect. Make note of places, characters, and activities mentioned in the Memories, then hand back the sheets.

What is a measure of success, if not the number of goals achieved divided by the number of tries it took you? Embrace your desires!

- Imperial Propaganda

Challenges and Difficulty

At all times the Imperial Citizens' actions are followed, measured and catalogued by an invisible Watcher. The Watcher determines the details of the Citizens' missions and the difficulty of the tasks they face. Remember that the judgment of the Imperial Corps is immaculate. The Watcher wants what is best for the Empire, and is each Citizen's direct route to earning their Imperial Measure.

Difficulty Levels

When the players face a task and the outcome is both uncertain and has interesting consequences for failure, the Watcher assigns a difficulty rating to the challenge.

1: A simple task for a trained character. Stitching a wound, driving along a winding road, or buying an uncommon good at market value is Difficulty 1.

2: An uncertain task for a trained character. Storing a particularly volatile chemical, blasting through an asteroid with a ship's lasers, or knowing about an obscure extraterrestrial creature is Difficulty 2.

3: A very difficult task for a trained professional. Fixing the ship's thrusters with scrap parts, blustering your way into an

unscheduled audience with an Imperial Watcher, or using powered armor to wrestle an angry extraterrestrial into an airlock is Difficulty 3.

4: A complex task that requires a streak of good luck or help from allies. Placing first in a famous race through an asteroid field, keeping a mortally wounded person alive long enough to get into a stasis tube, or trading your old junker ship for tickets to an exclusive party is difficulty 4.

5: A task of legendary proportions. Barring extraordinary good luck, even the most talented Citizens require help from their friends. Fighting your way through a room full of trained guards, remotely disabling the security systems of a prison, or

negotiating a peace treaty with the bitter Rebels is difficulty 5.

Rolling Dice for a Challenge

Once the difficulty of an action has been determined, the Citizen who attempted the action assembles their pool of dice to roll. The dice pool is equal to the Citizen's Skill being used + the Career for that skill + Help dice.

Help dice can be given by any fellow Citizen who has at least one point in the Skill being used and can explain how they are helping with the action. By giving a help die, that player is also subject to the consequences of the action being performed. For example, if one Citizen is helping another to Trade for the best ship in the

black market and the action fails, the two might find themselves surrounded by folks with itchy trigger fingers and some tough questions.

With the pool assembled, the Citizen rolls the dice. Each die showing a 4, 5, or 6 is a success. If enough successes have been rolled to equal or exceed the Difficulty set by the Watcher, the attempted action is successful. The Citizen who made the action gets to describe their success, with added commentary by any helpers. Then, the Watcher gets to add any other details.

If the dice rolled are under the Difficulty number, fear not! It's time to up the stakes. There are two ways for a Citizen to modify a failed roll: **Dirty Tricks**, and **Making it Lethal.**

Dirty Tricks

When you choose to break the law, act against Imperial interests, or bring shame and dishonor to yourself or the Glorious Empire Itself, you may pick up any or all of the dice you rolled and re-roll them. Describe what sort of underhanded actions you are taking. The Watcher will be taking note of this, and it will come back to haunt you, but it might help you and your friends in the short term. Watcher, keep a tally of each time a particular Citizen resorts to Dirty Tricks.

Making it Lethal

After a failed roll, you may choose to put your life on the line. Roll 3 more dice. If the dice rolled still have not reached the Difficulty number set by the Watcher, you

die. However, you put your last breath into making sure the action succeeds. Describe your blaze of glory, you badass space cowboy. After this scene ends, it's time to see if you earned your Imperial Measure.

If Making it Lethal does cause you to surpass the difficulty level, describe your uncomfortably close brush with death. You or the Watcher may describe wounds or other fallout of the action that might hinder you if they are not addressed. Watcher, keep a tally of each time an individual citizen chooses to Make it Lethal.

Note: You may not use Dirty Tricks for re-rolls after Making it Lethal. Results of Making it Lethal are final. Unlike other consequences, people who lend a Help die

are not subject to death -- the Citizen making the roll takes full responsibility.

Failure

A high-speed chase through a canyon results in crash-landing on a hostile planet. A simple trade deal goes sour when the brokers lock the doors and put on gas masks. Somebody vastly underestimates the reasoning power of a newly discovered life form.

When a Citizen fails to beat the Difficulty of a challenge (and has opted not to Make it Lethal), they have failed. Remember, however, that nobody should be rolling for a challenge unless failure is interesting.

Watcher, this is your chance to complicate matters. Think about the possible repercussions of a botched attempt, or about what exactly caused the failure. Make consequences interesting, and use them to keep the game rolling forward. Also remember that anybody who lent a Help die is subject to the consequences of failure.

Finally, remember that a Citizen is only subject to dying if they decided to Make it Lethal. Getting badly banged up is a possibility, but until a Citizen decides that it's an all-or-nothing action, they know to get to safety if things start to go badly.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
- Revelation 21:1

Dying and the Imperial Measure

When a Citizen dies, their designated Watcher takes the sum of all their deeds and compares it to the cost of their new life. Roll two six-sided dice and add them together. Add 1 to the total for each time the Citizen has resorted to Dirty Tricks during this lifetime. Subtract 1 from the total for each time the citizen has Made it Lethal during this lifetime. This is the Citizen's Imperial Measure.

Compare the Imperial Measure to the total number of Missions the Citizen has completed for the Watcher during this lifetime. If the Citizen has completed a number of Missions equal to or greater than their Imperial Measure, they have been deemed worthy of another life.

The successful Citizen may come back on the next mission with a new Incarnation of the same character. They get to add one new point to a Career (never going higher than 3 points in one career) and a Skill associated with that Career. This should be reflective of the skills that were used during the character's previous life. Then, add a new Memory that carried over from the previous life.

However, this is also a chance to successfully retire the character. They have

earned another life -- this is a great time to call an end to Imperial Service and pursue personal happiness. The character wins their happy ending. Give them an epilogue. The character can be brought back in as an NPC to interact with, but is now safe from harm unless authorized by the player.

If a Citizen fails the Imperial Measure, their journey is at an end. They have achieved Final Death. If this happens (or the player decided to retire a successful Citizen), the player may create a new Citizen or take over an existing character using the character creation rules. Alternatively, the player can try being a Watcher for a while!

Imperial Citizen **[REDACTED]** *is hereby promoted to Watcher Rank One. We grant access to local surveillance, historical records, and the attached list of Citizens to attend to. Serve righteously.*

- Secure Transmission to the Outer Rim

The Watcher

The Watcher's role in Imperial Measure is not quite like that of the other players. While the Citizens are focused on the very personal aspects of their Missions and Goals, the Watcher brings the rest of the world to life and makes the Citizens' lives interesting and complicated. This is done through Missions and the Challenges that grow from them.

Missions

A Watcher lives to serve the Empire and promote activities that further Imperial goals. The strongest tool for accomplishing this is the authority to give Missions to Imperial Citizens.

A Mission is a short adventure that the Citizens will embark on. The Watcher gives a succinct end goal -- Get the Rebel forces off of the Space Station. Find the source of the distress signal on this planet. Find and deliver a specimen of a newly discovered species.

It should take between half an hour to an hour to play through one Mission. Aim to have three big and important obstacles presented to the Citizens over the course of a

Mission, with room for smaller Challenges that arise during play.

Here are some examples of paths the Citizens might take from one obstacle to the next:

Linear:

Obstacle 1 → Obstacle 2 → Obstacle 3

With a Mission to silence a Rebel leader, the Citizens disable the building's security, sneak through the air ducts, then have a final confrontation with the Rebel and his goons.

In a linear Mission, the team is together much of the time and can gather many Help dice.

Simultaneous:

Obstacle 1

Obstacle 2

Obstacle 3

The Citizens split up to disrupt a smuggling ring. One undercuts prices in the market. Another tampers with the ring's product. Two more show up uninvited at the ringleader's home with choice words and big guns.

In a simultaneous Mission, the team must split up to accomplish their goals. Their resources are stretched thin by the lack of Help dice, and individual success has a big impact on the flow of the mission.

Converging:

Obstacle 1 →

             Obstacle 3

Obstacle 2 →

    The Citizens are on a mission to investigate a derelict ship. One team goes to find out where the crew went. The other Citizens try bringing power back online. This wakes up the aliens sleeping on the ship. Both teams regroup, retreat to their ship, and nuke the derelict.

    In a Converging mission, the team splits up, then comes back together to work towards a big push. It starts out tricky, then they are able to bring all of their Help dice to bear.

Example of Play

Alan, Beatha, and Cory are a 3-player team. Willem is the Watcher. Willem sets them on a Mission to destroy the reputation of Mara Yong, a prominent rebel. The Citizens decide that one of them will create a diversion at the rebel base, another will gain physical access to their data center, and the third will frame Mara so that she will take the blame for the stolen data.

This sounds like a pretty simple simultaneous plotline for the Mission. In order to get Mara out of the picture, all three of the Citizens' ations need to succeed. Without stealing the data, there is nothing to pin on Mara. Without the diversion, the infiltration will be noticed, and there can be some doubt about Mara's guilt. And without getting Mara into the right place at the right

time, there's no telling who the Rebels will blame it on.

Alan goes first and uses his Piloting Skill to drive his armored personnel carrier through a wall of the base as a diversion. Willem rules that this will be a difficulty 2 task -- all kinds of things can go wrong when you're driving through a wall. Alan adds his Piloting Skill of 1 to his Spacer Career of 3, for a total of 4 dice. He rolls 3 successes -- plenty to succeed at the action. Alan describes accelerating to ramming speed, then bursting through the wall into the rebel base! Willem adds that the rebels start taking shots at the APC.

Beatha goes next, trying to gain access to the rebels' databank. First, she attempts to sneak in with Stealth, but doesn't pass the check. Willem says that thanks to Alan's

distraction, guards are running through the hallways to repel the invasion. She gets a few steps in, then has to duck into a closet. She's stuck for now.

Cory is up next. She tries to plant evidence in Mara's car using Stealth, but does not pass the difficulty check. "Unfortunately, Mara is wise enough to have a bodyguard who is watching her vehicle."

Returning to Beatha, she musters up her courage and uses Clout to make her way into the hallway and blend in with the Rebels until she can find a map to the data center. Willem rules that this is a Difficulty 2 check. Beatha rolls 2 successes and makes her way to her goal.

Cory tries to use Engineering to access Mara's workstation remotely, making it look like as if Mara was looking up a map of the ventilation system. It's a good idea, and Willem rules it as another Difficulty 2 Challenge, but Cory manages to roll 1 success on her four dice for the challenge. The network is locked down and Cory can't get in.

The situation is getting desperate. Cory wants to make sure that this succeeds -- the mission depends on it. She could pull a Dirty Trick, breaking the law by trading a secret of the Empire to Jules, a freelance hacker she knows, in exchange for his help. Or she can Make it Lethal, jacking into the neural network to process information at superhuman speeds.

Cory decides to go for a Dirty Trick first and re-rolls the 3 dice that did not succeed. One of them comes up a success, so she manages to do it. The Mission is a success! Alan and Beatha are one Mission closer to earning their Imperial Measure. Cory, on the other hand, sees the Watcher add a tally next for her Dirty Trick.

Immortality isn't cheap.