Military Role-play

This guide is intended to provide guidance to those players who are interested in playing a military character, already play such a character, or are involved in the operation of a military organization. As such, it is divided into four main topics: creating a character, playing a "grunt" or low-ranking, run-of-the-mill soldier, being a captain or commanding officer, and running the whole show from the flag level. While it is focused on military role-playing, it has advice that can be applied to almost any organization.

Introduction

The most important thing that any military org must consider up front is its image. While it is possible to generalize about how a soldier or commanding officer should behave, or what sorts of motivations may drive them, there will be significant differences from world to world and race to race,. Furthermore, behavior that may be acceptable for a military character in one organization may be inappropriate in another. It is essential, therefore, that the OOC leaders of planets and military organizations establish guidelines that are available to players online, explaining as much as possible about the nature and function of their organization. This primer is not meant to replace such information, and may, in limited cases at least, even be contradicted by it. Each player should have the opportunity to learn all relevant information about an organization they are considering joining, in order to decide whether it is the right place for their character, or to aid them in the creation of a new character concept that would fit into that organization.

Creating a Military Character

Okay, as with all other forms of RP, there is nothing more important than the character concept with which you begin. What follows is some advice regarding things to think about when you are preparing to create a military character, as well as some pitfalls to avoid.

A. State your intentions:

The first thing you should be thinking about is, WHY do I want to play a military character? There is no right answer to this question, but some that you might want to think twice about are, "Because I want big guns," or "Because I want to beat other people up and not get in trouble." Some militaries do, indeed, have very nice weapons and ships, and there is nothing wrong with seeing that as an incentive. However, most military leaders are not going to particularly want to embrace new characters whose interests go no further than, "I want to blow stuff up, so I figured I'd be in the military." The best reason, in this writer's opinion, is of course that military RP can be a heck of a lot of fun, and is a completely different universe than civilian RP. The opportunities available are very different in the military...even as a grunt, you might find yourself involved in escorting a diplomat to important talks, guarding a president, pursuing terrorists, escorting convoys, etc. etc. These are types of RP that are not available in any other IC career. If these sorts of things appeal to you, you probably should proceed in creating your military character.

B. What makes your character tick?

The next thing to think about, once you've pinned down YOUR motivations, are the motivations of your character. WHY is this guy (or girl, or asexual being, as the case may be) interested in joining the military? This should, to a certain degree, be shaped by the race of the character and the organization to which you are applying. A Nekovalkyrja, for example, will probably have different motivations than a Nepleslian, and someone who lives on a world that has been threatened recently will probably have reasons for joining the military that are different from someone who lives on a powerful world with no immediate threats. Again, reasons such as, "I like to kill stuff" really don't cut the mustard. Try to be complex. Your character's reasons for choosing this career will shape their behavior and their possible course of advancement. Perhaps, for example, you had friends or family who were killed in a conflict with an alien race or a rival world. Maybe you think you're the best damn pilot in the galaxy and want to prove it by flying a fighter in the service of your world. Maybe you just want to see exotic places, or have a general sense of adventure. But THINK IT OUT before going ahead to create the character.

C. What are your character's goals?

Okay, you know why he/she/it wants to sign up. Now…what do they hope to accomplish? Do they just want to be a humble soldier, who keeps their head down and does their duty? Do they have aspirations to command a ship, or lead troops on the ground? Are they ambitious? And what is their place within the military, what are they good at? Engineers and fighter pilots are two radically different things that require different character concepts. The same sort of person who would make a good fighter pilot probably would have no interest in being an engineer, and vice versa.

D. UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE GETTING INTO.

This is VERY important. Being in the military is NOT like being a civilian. As a soldier, you are expected to be someone who accepted the limitations on life and behavior that come with BEING a soldier, when you signed up, and once you are fully trained, many things should be second nature to you. This means that you don't go off "on leave" whenever you want, just because you know RP is happening elsewhere. It may seem unfair to be left out of something you know is happening on Yamatai if you're in the Nepleslian Army, but you know what? Not all RP events are MEANT for everyone. Trust me, there have been, and will be, many events that are focused on military characters and largely exclude civilians. That is the nature of things; it's one of the reasons being a civilian is NOT the same as being a soldier, and vice versa.

Another point to remember is that there are standards of behavior that all members of a military organization are expected to follow. Presumably, you've been through a rigorous training program that has drilled certain things into your head, like your obligations to duty, your respect for superior officers, and your belief in following orders. While certain IC situations may arise in which your character becomes insubordinate or disobeys orders, these should not be things that happen lightly, and should be thoroughly role-played. If you are considering such actions, you should weigh your character's motivations and beliefs against the situation he or she is in. A lot of people on Star Army seem to want to role-play "tough guy" characters in the military who don't like being pushed around, even by superior officers. I have witnessed people who have basically said, "Well, my character is this badass, and he's a

little screwy, so when his sergeant orders him around, he'll just pull out his gun and tell sarge where he can get off." Um, no. While in certain cases it may be acceptable to play a mentally unbalanced soldier (it IS possible to crack under the pressure, after all) this again should be something that is well-thought out and clearly role-played. If you're looking to play the independent hero-type who never lets anyone push him around, that's fine, but DON'T JOIN THE MILITARY. Your character has accepted the consequences of military life by joining up, and within a few days of basic training those consequences would have been abundantly clear. You must OOCly accept these consequences as well. And remember…superior officers do not always have to be NICE. If you're having trouble imagining military life, go rent a movie…I'd recommend "Full Metal Jacket," "Patton," "Heartbreak Ridge," and "Saving Private Ryan," just to name a few.

Being a Grunt

Ok, you've signed on the dotted line, and your butt is now the property of whatever military you have seen fit to join. Most characters will start out as a fairly low-ranking member of that organization, and will be expected to work their way up. The truth of the matter is that the majority of military characters will never advance beyond mid-level officer rank, because command and flag positions are relatively few. That should not stop you from being ambitious, if that is part of your character's makeup. However, at its most basic level, simply being a soldier will be the source of your greatest RP at the start of your IC career.

What does this mean? Well, soldiers behave in certain ways…depending on what their specific task is, and what the overall mentality of their unit or military force is. They behave in certain ways around other soldiers, and they behave in certain ways around civilians. Understanding this can be a tremendous source of spontaneous RP. Again, let's discuss some basic points to think about.

A. What are you?

This is the easy one. You've thought about what makes your character tick, and what their goals and ambitions are. Now, you need to figure out what it is they actually do on a day-to-day basis. Are you an engineer on a warship? Are you a fighter pilot? Are you a marine or infantryman, a navigator, a gunner? Chances are you will be assigned to some sort of job when your character is ready for action. There are more elaborate options as your career advances, depending on the organization, of course…you might be an intelligence officer, or a ship captain, or a drill sergeant. Whatever you are, though, you need to realize something: you're a soldier, which means you spend lots and lots of time training to be GOOD at whatever it is that you do, and this should be a certain point of pride and a source of confidence. Don't be afraid to develop an attitude. Fighter jocks should have a certain swagger to them. Marines or infantrymen should take pride in their toughness, and have a healthy arrogance toward people with more "cushy" jobs aboard ships or behind desks (and these people should generally think of the ground-pounders as sort of stupid.) Developing the attitude appropriate to your position and role is important for two reasons: it gives you a means of shaping character interaction (fighter pilots might brag about their accomplishments or try to best each other, off-duty marines might get into the occasional barfight to prove how tough they are…members of different branches of the same service may feel rivalry or even dislike for each other.) In addition, it can help gain recruits. Someone may look at you and say, "Wow,

look at those marines, they really have the attitude down, they look like a fun group, I want to be part of it," or, "Wow, check out those hotshot fighter pilots. They make it look like fun to BE one of those guys, even on the ground." It works. Trust me.

B. What kinds of stuff do you DO?

Look, reality is, there is not always going to be a superior officer online, telling you what to do. Once you understand what your role is, once you've got the swagger or the attitude down, you need to put that knowledge to use to keep yourself busy. On a day-to-day basis, you need to think about what your character would DO with him/her/itself, in the absence of specific orders. If you can't come up with a few things, you're going to be bored a lot of the time. And the key is, your ideas don't have to be too complex. Fighter pilots might, if they have clearance, take their fighters out on patrol now and then, or even race against each other or practice in sims, but they can also simply lovingly polish their ships, talk to them, baby them, paint kill decals on them, etc. Of course, this is only fun if someone else is around at the time, like everything. A marine, infantryman or security officer might go on patrol around their local city, interacting with any civilians they see like a soldier who is working hard at keeping them safe. They also could get together with their buddies and have target practice, maybe even betting money on it. Engineers can fix stuff, or break stuff, which is even more fun…they can always be tinkering with their ship, working to upgrade it, keep it running, etc. Ideally, an engineer would have a relationship with the ship itself (see Scotty in Star Trek.) All of this can be the source of spontaneous RP (those fighter jocks bragging in the ship's lounge will get real worried when the ship's reactor core starts to overload, for example.) Point is, don't wait for RP to come to you.

C. Don't be too anxious for advancement.

Hey, it can be FUN to be a low-ranking grunt. You don't necessarily have to be a very smart character, and your responsibility level is much lower than a command-level officer. Besides that, you're most likely to see action when you're a grunt. You're the guy who will be sent in to the dangerous situation, or be on the front lines. Do not overestimate this. Yeah, sure, it's fun to be the boss, or to command your own ship. But it's a lot more work and responsibility. As a grunt you have freedom that you will not have as your career advances. Enjoy it while it lasts…you might decide you want to leave it that way.

Being a Captain (and making it all work)

Time for a serious shift in focus. Up to this point, this guide has been aimed at helping players develop military character concepts and begin role-playing. From this point forward, it will address itself more to issues involving the health of the organization itself. In that regard, the next two sections focus on the key personnel in any military organization: the ship captains, and the flag officers.

Because of the nature of Star Army, all militaries are generally built around ships of some kind. That is to say, a ship crew is the fundamental military unit of Star Army or any similar space-based game. Ship captains, therefore, are the single most important people in any military organization, and have the greatest responsibilities within it.

That is important enough to say again: **Ship captains are the single most important people in any military organization, and have the greatest level of responsibility.**

That being said, the argument could be made that the single greatest problem shared by military organizations on Star Army is a shortage of captains who understand their function and are good at their job. This is probably the single greatest hindrance to the growth of military organizations, and the most difficult problem to overcome. A good ship captain can single-handedly transform an entire military organization. I have seen it happen. A bad captain, or an inactive one, or one who does not understand that there IS a difference between being a grunt and being a CO, is RP death for a crew.

So what is the difference, and what is a captain's job? Well, the difference is primarily one of scale. Just like a grunt needs to figure out things that he/she/it would do when not being given orders from higher up, a ship captain needs to ALWAYS be thinking of things that his/her/its ship would be doing when not being given orders from higher up, which will probably be most of the time. In short, **the captain bears principle responsibility for generating consistent and organized RP for his or her crew.** As has been stated, a ship crew is the fundamental unit of all military organizations on Star Army. Therefore, it **is the function of a captain to generate the RP that keeps a military organization alive**. This is a weighty responsibility, and quite frankly, not everyone is cut out for it. It requires an active and committed person who is at least mildly creative.

Now, there are things any ship captain HAS to understand. Below are listed a few of them.

A. For all intents and purposes, YOU are the boss.

Yes, you have a command structure, and yes, you have superior officers. But it is NOT your job to sit around and wait for them to tell you what to do. "Personal initiative" should be the most important phrase in your vocabulary. If your ship sits in port forever because you never receive orders, YOU ARE NOT DOING YOUR JOB. Maybe the people above you are not doing theirs, but even the best flag officers and political leaders will only be able to intermittently give their military forces specific missions. Your job is NOT to wait for them. If you don't get that, it's time to find a new line of work. You should look at your superiors as people who OCCASIONALLY intrude on your own well-established routine with specific assignments…not as people on whom you are dependent for RP. **The everyday RP begins with YOU.**

B. Understand what your ship IS.

It is not a taxi that is used to get from point A to point B. It is your command. It is also your home, and the home of your crew. You should cherish it, be attached to it, be proud of it. You should know its quirks (and you may want to invent a few) and you should know its strengths. You should know, above all else, that it is fundamentally a **self-sustaining RP environment**, sort of like a small planet, and that you are in charge of it. You need to understand that much of your RP should center on and around your ship. And there is plenty that you can do. A routine patrol is always a nice way to start out. You might want to go "show the flag" near some troublesome neighbors or a colony world. You may see a freighter in need of escort. You may see nothing at all, but get your crew practice flying and role-playing together. You can also run drills of various sorts. You may wish to practice boarding operations, by dividing your crew and having half try to "storm" the ship while the other half defends it (all using non-lethal weapons, of

course.) Or you can create and control NPC crew to serve as the defenders. If there is more than one ship in your fleet, you may want to practice combat maneuvers with them (remember, that ship's captain has the same burdens you do.) If your ship is a carrier, you may want to drill fighter ops. There are all sorts of things you can come up with. You should also get used to having your ship just BE in space, and get your crew used to Rping in some "off-duty" situations on the ship itself. A good captain will take their ship out, or otherwise run activities with their crew, at LEAST two or three times a week. This is a MUST to maintain an active crew. Don't give them something to do, and they won't log on.

C. Communicate, communicate, communicate!

This is your ship, and your crew. You need to be the orchestrator, the schedule-maker, the person who puts it all together. Use the forums and their Private Message system, or get your crew's email addresses and mail them. TELL members of your crew, or even other members of your military organization who are NOT a part of your specific crew, that you have activities planned for a specific time and day. You know what? Not all of them will be able to make the time you choose. There will be grumbling about that. Try your best to be flexible in your scheduling, and arrange a couple of things to do per week on different days and times. Even if members of your crew can't make it, they will know you are doing something. It's a good feeling to know you have a captain who is trying to make things happen. When you lose touch with your crew, you've lost the battle.

These are a few, general points. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of being an active and engaging captain. Next, however, we'll deal with the big bosses.

Being a Fleet Commander

Not all militaries have the same structure. Some will have considerable civilian political oversight, while some will not. Generally, however, there will be some sort of individual who has the IC responsibility of Commander-in-Chief. There also may be lesser deskbound officers who assist that person, or command specific divisions of a military organization. These positions are not very RP-intensive, and sometimes are held by admin NPCs, but often they are not, and even admins need to consider a few points about the view from the top.

The job of these flag-level officers is basically to keep everything running. They are generally an information conduit between the government authority and the people who actually get stuff done (the captains.) They DO have an RP generation role, and should try to remain active in giving orders to the units under their command, ensuring they stay busy. More importantly, however, they evaluate personnel.

This, I think, is the most important point to be considered about this kind of position. The importance of an active and creative ship captain has already been emphasized. It is the Fleet Commander's job to FIND such people to command his/her/its ships, and to FIRE anyone who does not measure up. NOTHING brings RP death like a bad CO. A flag officer has to not be afraid to relieve a captain who is not keeping their ship active. In this sense, you must look to both the IC and OOC good of the ship in question. Frequently, people in this sort of position look at an inactive captain with an inactive crew and say, "Well, they are a good person, I'll give them time to get it together." Certainly, speaking with and properly

warning an underperforming captain is important, and this might be handled both in-character and out-of-character. But NEVER give a bad CO too much leeway. You cannot afford to have their poor performance cause other members of your organization to go permanently inactive. It's your job to push your captains, keep the pressure on, help out with mission assignments when you can, and fire them when they don't do the job.

Beyond this, the fleet commander is the ultimate keeper of the "image" of that particular military organization. They set the tone, and lead by example. If members of that organization are consistently displaying inappropriate behavior (of the type described in the first few sections) it is their responsibility to correct the problem whenever possible. Inspections are one great way to accomplish this, and can be a great source of RP for all involved.

Conclusion

Military Roleplay has a lot of potential but isn't for everyone. Hopefully, this guide will be useful to players at all levels who are trying to make this kind of RP work, or are trying to decide if it is for them. There is much more that could be said about all these topics, and many others, and there are many other challenges to building a prosperous organization that this document has not addressed. It is the hope of the author, however, that this serve as a starting point. Again, the wide range of military organizations on Star Army makes it hard to make specific recommendations of policy, and these guidelines are intentionally very general in nature. The IC and OOC leaders of the various military organizations have the responsibility of establishing clear and accessible guidelines for their organization, and this guide is meant at best to be a supplement, not a replacement. I hope it has been helpful.

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