

Just How Good is My Character?

Experience Levels in Stellar Horizons

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As characters travel between the trackless void between the stars, overcoming challenges on exotic worlds, you may ask yourself, just how good is my character? What is he supposed to be able to do at a given TXP level? How does he compare to other adventurers travelling across the Deep Range?

This is a difficult question to resolve as there are no real guideposts for character levels in the Stellar Horizons Basic Set. Characters also start their careers with a diversity of skills, the level of which varies dramatically from one character to the next. When combined with the ability of a character to dump huge amounts of XP into a single skill over a few games, it is easy to see how things can be hard to define or even can get out of hand.

In this article we intend to describe the levels that a character transitions through rise from 0 to 500 TXP. These levels are Novice, Experienced, Veteran, and Accomplished. Each corresponds to a particular TXP level and represent certain accomplishments and skill levels. Here we will attempt to describe what an average character experiences as they arrive at each level during their adventuring career. Skill levels, equipment, and jobs typical of characters at each level will all be described. At the end of this article is a table listing the average skills of characters at various levels.

Even with these tools it should be remembered that these are guidelines. If your campaign is played at a higher or lower level than the typical Stellar Horizons game then you will have to adjust these statistics accordingly. For most, these guidelines will help to maintain game balance, especially at the beginning of a campaign when some characters will be well above average in some areas, while below average in others. These statistics are also a great resource for Mission Directors to use when creating NPC's of differing experience levels.

Novice (0 TXP)

This is where it all begins for most newly created characters. Novice characters haven't had a chance to experience the universe for themselves. They are relatively new to the adventuring life and have little practical knowledge beyond their home and native culture.

These characters may be trained soldiers who never saw much action, college graduates seeking work on the frontier, or someone from a merchant family who was never able to leave their family's ship when in port. Most are young adults who are eager to seek new opportunities in the vast universe beyond their home. Others are more mature individuals with technical skills who, for either reasons of choice or necessity, are hoping to use them out in space. The one thing that all now share regardless of their background is that they are out on their own for the first time. They are now far away from family, friends and coworkers and thrust out into the dangerous environment of the frontier.

They are not ace pilots, renowned scientists, mysterious bounty hunters, legendary super hackers, or world leaders...at least not yet. They are at the beginning of their adventuring career and most are unknown to those outside their immediate social circle. Early on they will have to prove themselves to those they meet to show that they are capable professionals who are worthy of respect.

Novice Skills

The skills that Novice characters possess are those that they learned from their family, their school, the military, their job, or have somehow picked up on their own. There are usually many skills that they still wish to learn, and some that they do not know they will need yet. This is an opportunity to round out the character, solidify the player's initial vision, and add depth to the young adventurer. Many will spend time raising low level skills, picking up a language, or buying a critical missing skill.

Technician characters (doctors, scientists, technicians)

Most will have had some formal schooling in their field or they will have learned on their own by practical experience, but not both. They have an idea of how their field 'should' operate, but lack the experience to know shortcuts, exceptions to rules, or what is best in the field and what should be left in the classroom.

Combatant characters (mercenaries, soldiers, bounty hunters)

These characters have had a degree of training, but still have not mastered the basics. They know the theory, but have little practical experience. Most will not have seen combat outside of a street fight or bar dispute. Those who *have* seen combat were lucky to survive it as most would consider them to be unreliable. Military units at this level are considered Green.

Frontiersman characters (pilots, merchants, and surveyors)

Novice frontiersmen have just ventured onto the universe for the first time. Most have just left the space force, flight school, trade academy, or survey school and are hoping to hire on with a more established organization to earn a living and put their skills to work.

Criminal characters

Characters who have chosen a life of crime are amateurs with little experience and no finesse. They are the petty street thugs, the hackers who use programs they found off the hypernet, and small time burglars. If they take measures to avoid getting caught they are only the most basic precautions. Security forces don't see them as being much of a threat to the peace of their area.

Vehicles and Equipment

Novice characters are trying to make due with the basics. They simply don't have access to high end gear, and there may be items that they have to do without. The equipment that they have comes from what they could find in local specialty stores, hypernet catalogs, and local shops. These items are purchased with whatever savings they had prior to their adventuring career. This situation will improve as they work their first few jobs and are able to fill in gaps in their inventory, but it will still be a struggle to keep everything they need on hand.

A character may have a personal vehicle such as an OTV, car, motorcycle, or lunar rover which they used for getting around their home town or from a job before their adventuring career, but not much else. None would have a starship of their own at this level, although it may be a long term dream. For travel between the stars they are dependant on others.

Employment and Travel

During this phase of their adventuring careers Novice characters have a short resume. They are largely dependant on starport job postings, a wealthy individual, major company, or personal referrals for work. Many of their early jobs will involve them working as supplemental personnel, trouble consultants, survey team members, or as additional ship crew. It will give them a chance to improve their skills and make some money as they travel between the stars.

Their employment will usually take them through populated regions along well travelled routes. When they do venture off a major route, they will be well supplied, but they won't go far or stay very long. They fulfill the missions deemed too dangerous for regular people, but not quite risky enough to bring in the high dollar specialists.

In short, the main focus of a character at this point in their career is trying to find regular work, maintain their equipment, and improve their skill set. It is also at this level that characters build their reputation and make the early contacts that they will call on later in their lives.



Experienced (100 TXP)

After a few adventures players will begin to notice how their character is changing. They aren't the unprepared idealists that they were when they began. They are now wiser, more skilled, and better equipped to handle the challenges of an uncertain universe. Indeed, they are much more balanced and better reflect what the player had in mind when they were created.

Experienced characters adventuring on the frontier are watching the universe unfold around them. Only now are they beginning to see its depth, mystery, and danger. From this point they can see that the universe is a vast place with endless career options to choose from. It is here that they begin to form an idea of how they are going to fit into this larger world around them.

Experienced Character Skills

The skill sets of Experienced characters are very different from those of a Novice. Over the course of their early adventures they have begun to improve their core skills. These are those needed for survival such as Dodge, Perception, and others. They also include the skills in the character's chosen field, such as Hyperdrive Repair for an engineer. They are not masters of their chosen field yet, but they are no beginner.

These characters have been around the block and know what it takes to survive on the Deep Range. As they continue to adventure they will pick up a few new skills that they find they need to get their jobs done. They may also branch out within their field of specialty to broaden their capabilities and diversify their skill set.

Technician characters (doctors, scientists, technicians)

Over the past few adventures these characters have gained a better understanding of how their skill is applied in the real world. After having been tested under field conditions they now know what works and what is simply academic theory. They have even learned some shortcuts and problem solving work-arounds that they didn't know before. Most importantly they can see just how much they have to learn.

Combatant characters (mercenaries, soldiers, bounty hunters)

A combatant character at this level has a firm grasp on the basics. They are reliable, know their duties, and are not prone to panic under adverse conditions. Experience has improved upon their basic survival instinct. It has also taught them what gear to carry for a given situation and what to leave behind. Most will be familiar with how a typical job works, general combat tactics, and how to keep out of trouble. Military units at this level are considered to be Average.

Frontiersman characters (pilots, merchants, surveyors)

At this level a frontiersman character is getting an idea of just how vast and diverse the universe is. Most are now well versed in the simple routines of their jobs whether it be take off and reentry, balancing trade accounts, or knowing how to survive on hostile worlds. All are making new contacts, learning new things, and seeing places that they had only heard about in the days before their adventuring careers (and a great many others besides).

Criminal characters

Experienced criminal characters are beginning to distinguish themselves from the mass of miscreants that populate the

universe. They won't make the obvious mistakes that land their less experienced colleagues in a security cell. This criminal can plan ahead, take the time to get the job done right, and learn from mistakes. The character's operations are still on a small scale, but they are aware of larger criminal organizations operating around them. Law enforcement will tend to view the character as a suspect in crimes within the area that fit his *modus operandi*.

Vehicles and Equipment

Obtaining basic equipment is no longer an issue for the Experienced character. They have enough time in the field to see what they need and enough money to obtain all but the most expensive or specialized items. Equipment quality will now become an issue as they replace items that were simply functional with more capable gear. Experienced characters will also be able to acquire specialist gear for difficult missions, but it will be costly. Weaponry will be top end civilian or recent military surplus. Labor saving devices like robots and drones are now affordable options by the higher end of this level.

Experienced characters have put their beginning vehicles through their paces by now. They are well aware of what it can and can't do. They may have even replaced their old vehicle with a higher end model. This is common as they can now afford most civilian vehicles along with some military surplus models. The struggle to maintain and repair the vehicle is also a thing of the past. This will lead some characters to settle on a machine that will become their signature vehicle in the adventures to come.

Specialist vehicles, military craft, and starships remain beyond the reach of characters at this time. To use these craft they will have to seek to them from their employer. An employer who may provide one for the mission at hand.

Employment and Travel

Experienced characters can now see that the universe is a truly vast place with endless career options to choose from. Although they have not travelled very far from their starting point, they are much more comfortable with who they are when it comes to their abilities and limitations. The daily struggle to exist is now a thing of the past as they are now able to take on larger challenges. Whether it's taking on a Pirate World's smuggling ring, discovering the fate of an abandoned Terran colony, or dealing with a lone alien threat on the Deep Range, this is what these characters were made for!

When they apply for work they will now have a solid work history and list of employment references. Corporations and ship captains will tend to see them as reliable spacers who can get a dangerous job done if they are provided with reliable transport and the proper supplies.

The only liability that the characters will face is their lack of a starship. This fact means that they are not capable of independent operations and must rely on others for travel between the stars. This tends to restrict their activities to the same sector or hyperspace route where they began. A degree of freedom exists however. Since they now make enough money to hire a ship to transport them between systems when the need arises.

Veteran (300 TXP)

At this level a character has learned a great deal about the way things work in the universe and are beginning to see how they can fit into it. Their adventuring career has left them with friends, enemies, triumphs, tragedies, and lasting memories. Some of which will mark them forever. All will have become more adept in their chosen fields, while some may have found that their career path is now different from what they had originally intended. They have now become the tried and tested Veterans of the Stellar Horizons universe.

These Veterans have grown beyond what their player had initially intended and are now solidly capable individuals who are able to hold their own on the high frontier. It is sometime around this level that they will most likely acquire a starship of their own so that they can freely explore the universe and its mysteries on their own terms. It is also at this level that most characters will begin to carve out their own niche in the universe as they pursue the career that will make their mark on the galaxy.

Veteran Character Skills

The skill sets of Veteran characters are broader and better rounded than those of their Experienced brethren. Not only are they highly competent in their chosen field, but most have branched out into related disciplines as well. A sniper may have learned better field craft in the form of Stealth and Jungle Survival to improve his survivability, while a Xenobiologist may pick up Chemistry to support his Biology skill when dealing with exotic life forms. Some characters may have even found it useful to have learned a language or two in the course of their travels. It is this broadening of the skill set that reflects their adventuring experience. It also gives them depth that lower level characters lack.

At the higher end of this level, Veteran characters begin working towards a long term goal that they will follow for the rest of their lives. To some it means establishing a laboratory, a colony, shipping business, or criminal enterprise. To others it means making contacts with alien species or discovering new ones. At this stage the goal is still a long way off, but at least the character knows what it is and can work towards it without having to worry about the daily struggle for survival.

Technician characters (doctors, scientists, technicians)

Characters at this level have a solid foundation in their chosen field and make up the bulk of trained professionals encountered on the frontier. Their experience has shown them what works and what doesn't. If they encounter something that they don't know, they have enough knowledge to know where to look up the answer. More importantly they know what not to do in such situations. They are now able to understand complex theories within their field, whose concepts were well beyond them earlier.

Combatant characters (mercenaries, soldiers, bounty hunters)

A character at this level has seen enough action that survival is second nature. They know the routine and how a mission should unfold: what steps to take, what equipment works best, and what to look for in the field. They won't panic under even the worst conditions, and should that occur they will be able to get out

in good order. Most Veterans know to have a backup plan. They also know how to make due when confronted with second rate or poorly maintained gear. Military units at this level are considered to be Veteran.

Frontiersman characters (pilots, merchants, surveyors) Veteran frontiersmen are those people who hold the universe together. The spacers who maintain the trade routes, explore new worlds, and sustain distant colonies. They are the cargo pilots, short run traders, and independent surveyors who keep society running. These characters have a firm grasp of what it takes to make it on the high frontier. They also have a growing network of contacts to call on when they need help or need to find work. This becomes especially important as they acquire their own ship and begin to travel off the main routes. If they establish a business at this level it will be typically centered on a single ship and have a limited reach.

Criminal characters

Veteran criminals are quite skilled at their chosen vocation and won't typically be caught unless they attempt a job well beyond their abilities. At this level the character will be respected by other criminals as an up and coming player to be reckoned with. It is also at this level that many criminal characters begin trying to form a base or organization of their own. Law enforcement will see the character as a difficult suspect to pin anything on, but will be believed to be responsible for many things more than they can prove. If they form an organization then it will be seen as an emerging threat to be watched.

Vehicles and Equipment

The equipment needs of Veteran characters are little different from their Novice or Experienced counterparts. The difference is that Veteran characters now have the ability to buy basic equipment items with little problem and get them in quantity if need be. When it comes to more specialized gear the Veteran knows where to look for it and has the ability to acquire it. It is only the rarest, most exotic, or restricted items that are out of reach for them. Some can still be obtained, but at great cost. In some cases the character will have to begin an adventure for it.

The types of vehicles Veteran characters can own can be quite diverse. This is because they will be able to afford common vehicles such as hovercars, motorcycles, and OTV's with little effort. They can also acquire more specialized vehicles, drones, and military surplus as the need arises. These vehicles can be counted on during a crisis as they are kept fueled, armed, and well maintained.

Yet of all these vehicles that Veterans can own, the most significant vehicle that characters will attain at this level is their own starship. In most cases it will be a used vessel, but some enterprising characters may be able buy a new craft. No matter what type of ship it is, Veteran characters soon find that operating a starship is a very expensive proposition and will become a central focus of their adventuring careers at this level.

Employment and Travel

The majority of Veteran characters have a share in a starship or own one themselves. This allows them great freedom of movement and will enable them to explore the universe as they see fit. They can travel off route, explore worlds on their own, and go places that had been off limits

to them before (due to laws, conflict, or environmental hazard). They are now free to pursue their fortune on the high frontier.

Yet, as with all things, freedom has its price. Keeping a starship fueled and maintained is very costly. It means that the characters must regularly earn large amounts of money just to keep the ship running. Many ship owners turn to cargo speculation, freelance work, or attempt to hire



on with an established company. Fortunately, they will find a whole new class of jobs available to them. Such work will usually involve cargo transport, off route surveying, privateering, and even smuggling. They will make use of the fact that the characters are very skilled and can go wherever the patron needs them to. It is by undertaking missions like these that Veteran characters build their reputation and become known to more powerful patrons.

Those Veterans who choose not to own a starship will begin to chart their own path at this level. As they do this they will find that their reputation will continue to grow as their adventures take them from world to world. They will become familiar faces to reputable employers, government officials, and even criminal elements. Their social net will widen to include people who work for the well connected and powerful. They can contact these people to ask for favors or will be contacted to repay a favor that they owe.

Accomplished (500 TXP)

Characters at this level know what the universe has to offer for they have experienced a full measure of its rewards and dangers. They have taken great risks, investigated mysteries off the major routes, and braved alien encounters. These travels have earned them a reputation, a number of connections, and a great deal of wealth. Accomplished characters know how they want to carve out their niche in the universe and are working to fulfill that goal. Many will have had extensive contacts with the representatives of alien species, major corporations, and government entities. Others will have been working to establish laboratories, colonies, trading networks, mercenary companies, or criminal enterprises. Still others will be content to be experts in their field working for high paying employers.

Throughout this level an Accomplished character will find that they are now able to build and shape the universe around him. Scientists will take ships to distant worlds to conduct their own research, mercenaries will venture into war zones on missions of fortune, merchants will expand their trading company to neighboring systems, and criminals will see their operations grow in scale.

To many it seems that Accomplished characters have finally arrived, but in reality they will find that they have just entered a larger world of powerful players. This is because until now characters have been functioning outside the circles of power, but now their exploits, wealth, and ability allow them to bend and shape the world around them. This will draw the attentions of people in high places. Sector governors, Crystan Provicari, and pirate worlds faction leaders are just some of the people who may need them for missions. Some may even feel threatened by them. In these cases they will find many situations that cannot be handled by high skill levels alone. They will learn that political contacts, money, and the ability to provide equipment will often prove more effective than a laser pistol.

Accomplished Character Skills

Characters of this level will have a markedly different skill set than their less experienced brethren. They have risen above the masses who conduct the day to day business of the universe. They are respected as up and coming experts in their field who can get things done. Over the course of their adventures their specialty and survival skills will have risen to significant levels which put them ahead of less experienced Veterans. Even their secondary skills will have risen to levels well above their initial value giving them competence, not mere familiarity, with a number of disciplines. It is this wide ranging ability that distinguishes Accomplished characters from the rest.

Technician characters (doctors, scientists, technicians) Accomplished technical characters highly qualified experts in their field, but not yet masters of it. They have a deep understanding of their field of study, thorough knowledge of supporting disciplines, and a wealth of practical experience that few can match. Such characters can handle difficult tasks as part of a normal day's work and often come up with unconventional solutions to problems, but haven't the experience or insight to see beyond current theory. This level describes

most frontier surgeons, graduate students, computer security specialists, and starship performance modification technicians.

Combatant characters (mercenaries, soldiers, bounty hunters) Soldiers, mercenaries, and bounty hunters at this level are considered to be among the best available. Special Forces units fall into this category. Their training and experience allows them to adapt and overcome in almost any situation. They can survive in a variety of environments for an extended period of time. Many can even function in alien cultures with little difficulty due to their knowledge of customs and traditions. In the field they are highly observant and can often take on much larger forces on their own by using clever traps, unconventional warfare, and quick ambushes. Military units at this level are considered to be Elite.

Frontiersman characters (pilots, merchants, and surveyors) Accomplished frontiersmen are the trailblazers of the frontier. It is they who push the edges of civilization beyond the safety of the well known jump routes. It is they who surveying new worlds, establishing new colonies, and link them to the larger economy. Their extensive contacts and thorough knowledge of the region enable them to go deep into the frontier to explore strange worlds and return with a load of marketable cargo. Many frontiersmen operate businesses launching such missions. Most will start with a single well maintained vessel, but soon grow into multi-ship ventures stretching across the local sector.

Criminal characters

Criminal characters at this level are very well established and have a long range. Such individuals can travel quite a distance to accomplish a task or to elude authorities. They have extensive contacts and are well known in the criminal underworld. Organized criminals at this level typically operate smuggling or slave trading operations that extend into the neighboring systems of the sector. The character will be regarded as a serious problem by law enforcement agencies and rival criminals in the area.

Vehicles and Equipment

Accomplished characters often have large amounts of money at their disposal. They can buy large quantities of basic and specialist equipment should the need arise. They are also able to purchase bulk commodities such as building supplies, grain, fuel with little difficulty. These goods are often used for trade, for setting up a colony, or establishing a base of operations. For characters of this level only the rarest and most restricted items will remain beyond their reach, but they can often find out ways to obtain them or a reasonable substitute.

The vehicles that can be obtained by Accomplished characters are much like their other equipment. Common vehicles can be obtained in quantity. Construction equipment, military surplus, and survey vehicles can also be obtained in small numbers, but often prove quite costly. Low end military vehicles can also sometimes be purchased if the character knows the right people. Of course the character has the resources to hire mechanics to maintain and fuel this stable of vehicles.

At this level the day to day struggle of owning a starship is over. The ship is now a constant in their lives that will become their signature vessel for much of their adventuring career. Other characters will choose to upgrade their ship, buy a top of the line model, or even commission the

Table 1-1
Character Experience Levels

	Skills	Languages	Dodge	Alternate Dodge	Perception	Primary Weapon	Alternate Weapon	Primary Specialty	Alternate Specialty
Novice	12	1	30	35	35	40	40	35	35
Experienced	14	2	40	40	40	50	40	50	45
Veteran	16	2	50	45	50	55	40	55	55
Accomplished	20	3	70	50	55	65	50	60	55

Character Skill Levels

On the preceding pages we have explored the abilities of characters as they gain experience through their adventuring careers. In this section we put some numbers to the descriptions.

The table above lists average statistics for characters of each of the levels described in the article. The first and second columns show the average number of skills and languages the character should possess.

The third column lists the average Dodge skill for the character. This is followed by the average Alternate Dodge skill.

An alternate dodge skill is defined as any skill that can substitute for Dodge under certain circumstances. Examples would be swimming, 0-G training, climbing, and other related skills.

Perception is the next listed skill level. It is followed by the characters two highest weapon skills. The last two columns are for the characters primary and secondary specialist skills. These are the non-weapon skills that make up the character's specialty. Skills such as piloting, advanced medicine, computer repair, and any other skill that a character would use to define their occupation.

construction of a custom design. At the upper end of this level some characters are able to afford to operate a small group of starships.

Employment and Travel

Accomplished characters are quite like any before them. They have the ability to travel where they desire and remain there for extended periods of time. This allows them to travel from Earth to the most obscure off-route locations in search of fortune, knowledge, or glory. In fact,

the only real limits to their travels are fuel, time, and is anyone going to try and stop them when they arrive. Naturally this capability gives them a great deal of negotiating power when it comes to accepting jobs.

The type of work that characters of this level will be offered depends on if they have established an organization of some type or not. Those characters who have set up a trading business, science lab, smuggling organization, or mercenary company will find demands of managing such an organization will change the course of their adventuring career, and require them to search for missions, items, or people who will help their enterprise grow.

Those who choose not to settle down will find that they command top dollar when they look for employment. Governments, large companies, and wealthy benefactors will be their employers now. The jobs they take will often be worthy of their talents and abilities. They will go far afield for long periods of time encountering dangerous environments and hostile forces. Their social net will be wide and reach up to those in positions of power. They will only now be able to attend the court of a Crystan Provicari, sector governor, alien ambassador, or pirate leader. These individuals will call on them to perform tasks in return for wealth, property, and official recognition. They can also approach these figures with requests for favors that will occasionally be granted as convenience allows.

Beyond 500 TXP

As characters continue to adventure and gain even more experience they will quickly surpass the levels listed here. There are levels beyond these of course. Some characters have been played as high as 1400 TXP. These levels may seem incredible, but they are possible. Such adventures are very different from the low to mid-level adventures described here. They reflect different threats, challenges and are of a greater scope. Words such as Heroic, Epic, and even Legendary are used to refer to these high level characters. These levels will be left to your imagination for now, but will be covered in a future supplement.

