

# BLAKE'S 7

Story, History, and Gaming



# **Blake's 7**

## **Story, History, and Gaming**

*by*

*Stan Shinn*

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First Edition.

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# Introduction

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**B**LAKE'S 7 IS A THRILLING JOURNEY into a dystopian science fiction universe that originally graced the screens of the BBC between 1978 and 1981. In the tradition of blending real-world political conflicts with elements of rebellion, camaraderie, and intrigue, Blake's 7 is a timeless series that continues to captivate fans to this day.

Unlike the big-budget Hollywood spectacles of its time, Blake's 7 prioritized gripping storytelling and rich character development. Its protagonists were not the archetypal heroes but complex anti-heroes, each burdened with their own dark pasts. From smugglers and thieves to embezzlers and even murderers, Blake's crew embodied a motley mix of flawed individuals brought together by a common cause.

This book is an academic exercise that analyzes and documents the universe of the classic Blake's 7 TV series. We'll review the story told over four seasons, the characters, and sources and themes of the narrative. We'll also look behind the scenes of its production history and critical reception. A concise setting guide details the factions and politics of the Blake's 7 universe, its technology, and the worlds encountered during each episode. Finally, we'll examine how Blake's 7 can be modeled as a tabletop RPG game.

Spoilers abound in these pages. If you haven't watched the entire series but intend to, just skip the 'Plot Summary' section and avoid reading about the individual worlds.

Join me as we tour the fascinating world of Blake's 7.

— Stan Shinn

# Story

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**BLAKE'S 7** (SOMETIMES STYLED **BLAKES7**) is a British science fiction television program produced by the BBC. Four 13-episode series were broadcast on BBC1 between 1978 and 1981. It was created by Terry Nation, who also wrote the first series, produced by David Maloney (series 1–3) and Vere Lorrimer (series 4), and the script editor throughout its run was Chris Boucher, who wrote nine of its episodes. The main character for the first two series was Roj Blake, played by Gareth Thomas.

Blake's 7, which was broadcast in 25 other countries, had a low budget but featured many tropes of space opera, such as spaceships, robots, galactic empires, and aliens. Critical responses have been varied; some reviewers praised the program for its dystopian themes, strong characterization, ambiguous morality, and pessimistic tone, as well as displaying an "enormous sense of fun", but others have criticized its production values, and dialogue, and accused it of lacking originality.

A limited range of Blake's 7 merchandise was issued, and books, magazines, and annuals were published. The BBC released music and sound effects from the series, and several companies made Blake's 7 toys and models. Four video compilations were released between 1985 and 1990, and the entire program was released in video-cassette format starting in 1991 and re-released in 1997, and as four DVD boxed sets between 2003 and 2006. The BBC produced two audio dramas during 1998 and 1999 that featured original cast members and were broadcast by Radio 4. Although proposals for live-action and animated remakes have not been realized, Blake's 7 has been revived with two series of audio dramas, a comedic short film, and a series of fan-made audio plays involving the original cast.

## OVERVIEW

Four series of thirteen 50-minute episodes were made, and first broadcast in the United Kingdom between January 1978 and December 1981 by BBC1.<sup>1</sup> They are set in the third century of the second calendar (this is mentioned in associated publicity material, not in the series)<sup>2</sup> and at least 700 years in the future.<sup>3</sup> Blake's 7's narrative concerns the exploits of political dissident Roj Blake, who leads a small group of rebels against the forces of the totalitarian Terran Federation that rules the Earth and many colonized planets. The Federation controls its citizens through mass surveillance, brainwashing, and drug pacification. Blake was arrested, tried on false charges, and deported to a remote penal colony. En route, he and fellow prisoners Jenna Stannis, Vila Restal, and Kerr Avon break free and escape on a technologically advanced alien spacecraft, which its central computer 'Zen' informs them is named Liberator. Liberator's speed and weaponry are superior to Federation craft, and it also has a teleportation system that enables transport to the surface of planets. Blake and his crew begin a campaign to damage the Federation but are pursued by Space Commander Travis—a Federation soldier—and Servalan, the Supreme Commander and later Federation President.<sup>4</sup>

The composition of the titular "seven" changes throughout the series. The initial group—Blake, Vila, Gan, Jenna, Avon, and Cally—included Zen as the seventh mem-

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<sup>1</sup>Attwood, Tony; Davies, Kevin; Emery, Rob; Ophir, Jackie (1994). "Prologue". *Blake's 7: The Programme Guide*. London: Virgin Books. p. 9. ISBN 0-426-19449-7.

<sup>2</sup>The Federation introducing a 'new calendar' is mentioned in the episode *Pressure Point*. (Pixley, Andrew (October 2002). "Blake's 7: The Dirty Dozen in Space". *TV Zone* (156): 48–56. ISSN 0957-3844.)

<sup>3</sup>In the episode "Killer", a 700-year-old space ship is encountered, one of the first deep-space missions from Earth.

<sup>4</sup>Attwood, Tony; Davies, Kevin; Emery, Rob; Ophir, Jackie (1994). "The Stories". *Blake's 7: The Programme Guide*. London: Virgin Books. pp. 29–117. ISBN 0-426-19449-7.



Figure II.1: The spaceship Liberator in "Seek-Locate-Destroy" (S1E6)

ber. At the end of the first series, they capture a supercomputer named Orac. Gan is killed during the second series, after which Blake and Jenna disappear and are replaced by new characters Dayna and Tarrant. At the start of the fourth series, Cally dies and is replaced by Soolin. After the destruction of Liberator, the computer Zen is replaced by a new computer, Slave, on board their new commandeered ship Scorpio.

While Blake is an idealistic freedom fighter, his associates are petty crooks, smugglers, and killers. Avon is a technological genius who, while apparently motivated by self-preservation and wealth, consistently acts to help others. When Blake is separated from his crew, Avon becomes commander. At first, Avon believes the Federation has been destroyed; he becomes tired of killing and seeks rest. However, by the middle of the third series, Avon realizes that the Federation is expanding again, faster than originally realized, and he resumes the fight. The BBC had planned to conclude Blake's 7 at the end of its third series, but a further series was commissioned unexpectedly.<sup>5</sup> Some changes to the program's format were necessary, such as the introduction of a new spacecraft, Scorpio, and new characters, Soolin and

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<sup>5</sup>Stevens, Alan; Moore, Fiona (2003). "Season D". *Liberation. The Unofficial and Unauthorised Guide to Blake's 7*. England: Telos. p. 154. ISBN 1-903889-54-5.

Slave.<sup>6</sup> Blake's 7 was watched by approximately 10 million people in the UK and was broadcast in 25 other countries.<sup>7</sup>

## CHARACTERS

### REGULAR CHARACTERS

The rogues gallery of regular characters changes over the series.

**Roj Blake**, played by Gareth Thomas (leader of the crew in series 1–2, guest appearances in series 3–4). Blake is a long-term political dissident who uses the *Liberator* to wage war on the Federation. He is passionately opposed to the Federation's injustice and corruption and is prepared to accept loss of life in pursuit of its destruction. He thinks nothing of placing himself in danger to protect his crew or advance his cause. Although Blake is respected by many of his crew members, Avon accuses him of fanaticism and recklessness.<sup>8</sup>



Figure II.2: Pursuit ships in "Hostage" (S2E8)

**Kerr Avon**, played by Paul Darrow (series 1–4, leader of the crew in series 3–4). Avon is an electronics and computer expert who once attempted to steal 5 million credits from the Federation banking system. He distrusts emotion, and he attempts to pursue a code based on logic and reason. This frequently causes him conflict with Blake. He becomes a reluctant rebel, agreeing to participate only on the basis that he will control *Liberator* once the Federation is destroyed. At times, he seems motivated by financial gain and shows his readiness to put companions in danger in order to protect himself. He has an ambiguous and sometimes playful relationship

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<sup>6</sup>Fulton, Roger (1997). *The Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction* (3rd ed.). London: Boxtree. pp. 66–74. ISBN 0-7522-1150-1.

<sup>7</sup>Attwood, Tony; Davies, Kevin; Emery, Rob; Ophir, Jackie (1994). *Blake's 7: The Programme Guide*. London: Virgin Books. p. back cover. ISBN 0-426-19449-7.

<sup>8</sup>Attwood, Tony; Davies, Kevin; Emery, Rob; Ophir, Jackie (1994). "In Their Own Words". *Blake's 7: The Programme Guide*. England: Virgin Books. pp. 118–125. ISBN 0-426-19449-7.

with Servalan.<sup>9</sup> Avon appears in 51 of the series' 52 episodes, being absent only in the first episode, "The Way Back".

**Vila Restal**, played by Michael Keating (series 1–4). Vila is a skilled thief, lock-picker and conjurer and is usually reluctant to risk his life. His behaviour is often cowardly, and although other crew members regard him as tiresome, he has a high IQ. He has weaknesses for alcohol and women, and apparently talks to himself at times.<sup>10</sup> Vila is the only character to appear in every episode of the series.

**Jenna Stannis**, played by Sally Knyvette (series 1–2). Jenna is a glamorous space smuggler and skilled pilot who becomes adept at piloting *Liberator*. She has a great deal of affection for Blake, and is loyal to him once he gains her trust.<sup>11</sup> In earlier episodes, Jenna often maintains her opinions stubbornly.

**Cally**, played by Jan Chappell (series 1–3). Cally is an alien guerrilla fighter from the planet Auron. She is a telepath, like all of her people, who can transmit thoughts silently to others. She later develops mind-reading, telekinesis and precognition abilities, but is also uniquely vulnerable to telepathic control by alien forces.<sup>12</sup> Cally develops as the moral conscience of the group, especially for later episodes of series 2 and throughout series 3.

**Dayna Mellanby**, played by Josette Simon (series 3–4). The daughter of former dissident Hal Mellanby, Dayna is an expert in weapons technology. She is adept at designing mechanized weapons, but also appreciates the nobility of what she describes as more 'primitive' combat. Brave and loyal, but at times reckless and naive, she often successfully challenges men who are supposedly accomplished fighters.<sup>13</sup> Her vendetta against Servalan (who murdered her father) motivates her to endorse Avon's fighting of the Federation.

**Del Tarrant**, played by Steven Pacey (series 3–4). Tarrant is an expert pilot who trained with the Federation before beginning illegal activities. He is ruthless and charming, and often challenges Avon's leadership. He also takes advantage of the cowardice of Vila, whom he bullies into performing his instructions.<sup>14</sup>

**Olag Gan**, played by David Jackson (series 1–2). Having killed the Federation guard who murdered his girlfriend, Gan has been implanted with an electronic "limiter" device which prevents him from ever killing again. However, he is courageous, strong and dedicated to Blake's cause.

**Soolin**, played by Glynis Barber (series 4). Soolin is an expert gunfighter, distinctive for her apparent lack of fear or self-doubt, perhaps developed in response to the fact that her parents were murdered when she was a child. She joins the group after she is betrayed by Dorian, her partner. No-one can match her speed at drawing a gun. Soolin's logical and cynical attitude proves an asset to her colleagues. On several occasions, her quick thinking and prescient actions save the crew from perishing, overpowering the Cancer Assassin and surviving the Betafarl Conspiracy. Barber had also previously played the role of a Mutoid in series 1 (episode 9: "Project Avalon").

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<sup>9</sup>See footnote 8.

<sup>10</sup>See footnote 8.

<sup>11</sup>Attwood, Tony; Davies, Kevin; Emery, Rob; Ophir, Jackie (1994). "The Index". *Blake's 7: The Programme Guide*. England: Virgin Books. pp. 128–197. ISBN 0-426-19449-7.

<sup>12</sup>See footnote 11.

<sup>13</sup>See footnote 11.

<sup>14</sup>See footnote 11.



**Olag Gan**

**Kerr Avon**

**Vila Restal**

**Roj Blake**

**Cally**

**Jenna Stannis**

**Orac**

**Orac**, voiced by Derek Farr (first appearance) and Peter Tuddenham (series 2–4). Orac is a portable super-computer capable of reading any other computer's data and built by an inventor named Ensor. It uses a component called a Taniel cell—a universal computer component—and can access information stored on any computer that uses one. It can also control other computers. Orac dislikes work that it considers unnecessary, enjoys gathering information and has delusions of grandeur.<sup>15</sup>

**Zen**, voiced by Peter Tuddenham (series 1–3). The main computer aboard *Liberator*, Zen controls the craft's secondary systems, including the battle and guidance computers. It is susceptible to interference from outside influences, such as Orac. It is considered a character in its own right. It is rendered nonfunctional after *Liberator* is damaged by corrosive fluid particles, and is destroyed with the ship.<sup>16</sup>

**Slave**, voiced by Peter Tuddenham (series 4). Introduced during the fourth series, Slave was built and programmed by Dorian and is the master computer of Dorian's ship, *Scorpio*. It has a cringing personality, frequently apologetic and obsequious, and addresses Avon as 'master' and others as 'sir' or 'madam'.<sup>17</sup>

## OTHER RECURRING CHARACTERS

Notable recurring characters include Supreme Commander Servalan and Space Commander Travis.

**Supreme Commander Servalan/Commissioner Sleer**, played by Jacqueline Pearce. Servalan began her service career as a cadet, and eventually became Supreme Commander of the Terran Federation. Her desire for power began at the age of eighteen when her lover abandoned her. Shortly before the Intergalactic War, Servalan conducted a military coup and installed herself as president. She is later overthrown herself and presumed killed, but survives and adopts the pseudonym of Commissioner Sleer. She conducts a campaign of drug-induced pacification in order to regain territory for the Federation and her own position of power. Servalan is determined to pursue the crew of the *Liberator* and win control of the ship and Orac for herself.<sup>18</sup>

**Space Commander Travis**, played by Stephen Greif (first series) and Brian Croucher (second series). Travis is a dedicated and ruthless Federation officer, with the rank of Space Commander. His left eye and arm were destroyed by Blake, and replaced with an eye patch and a prosthetic arm fitted with a concealed weapon. Travis is known for treating his troops well and leading them personally, but also for his ruthlessness and contempt for human life. After his trial and conviction for killing civilians, Travis becomes increasingly obsessed with killing Blake.<sup>19</sup>

## SOURCES AND THEMES

Series creator Terry Nation pitched Blake's 7 to the BBC as "The Dirty Dozen in space", a reference to the 1967 Robert Aldrich movie in which a disparate group of convicts are sent on a suicide mission during World War II.<sup>20</sup> This influence shows in that some of Blake's devotees are escaped convicts (Avon, Vila, Gan and Jenna). Blake's 7 also draws much of its inspiration from the legend of Robin Hood.<sup>21</sup> Blake's devotees

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<sup>15</sup>See footnote 11.

<sup>16</sup>See footnote 11.

<sup>17</sup>See footnote 11.

<sup>18</sup>See footnote 11.

<sup>19</sup>See footnote 11.

<sup>20</sup>Pixley, Andrew (October 2002). "Blake's 7. 'The Dirty Dozen in Space'". *TV Zone* (156): 48–56. ISSN 0957-3844.

<sup>21</sup>Muir, John Kenneth (2000). "A Futuristic Robin Hood Myth". *A History and Critical Analysis of Blake's 7, the 1978-1981 British Television Space Adventure*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland. pp. 178–181. ISBN 0-7864-2660-8.

are not a band of "Merry Men". His diverse crew includes a corrupt computer genius (Avon), a smuggler (Jenna), a thief (Vila), a murderer (Gan), a telepathic guerrilla soldier (Cally), a computer with a mind of its own (Zen) and another wayward computer (Orac). Later additions were: a naïve weapons expert (Dayna), a mercenary (Tarrant), a gunslinger (Soolin) and an obsequious computer (Slave). While Blake intends to use *Liberator* to strike against the Federation, the others are often reluctant soldiers—especially Avon. Blake and Avon's clashes over the command represent a conflict between idealism and cynicism, emotion and rationality, and dreams and practicality.<sup>22</sup> Similar conflicts occur between other characters; the courage of Blake and Avon compared with Vila's cowardice, or Avon and Jenna's scepticism of Blake's ideals compared with Gan's unswerving loyalty, Blake's mass murdering methods compared with Avon's targeted and less destructive methods.<sup>23</sup>

Script editor Chris Boucher, whose influence on the series increased as it progressed, was inspired by Latin American revolutionaries, especially Emiliano Zapata, in exploring Blake and his devotees' motives and the consequences of their actions.<sup>24</sup> This is most evident in the episode "Star One", in which Blake must confront the reality that in achieving his goal of overthrowing the Federation, he will cause chaos and death for many innocent citizens.<sup>25</sup> When Avon gains control of *Liberator*, after Blake's disappearance after the events of "Star One", he uses it to pursue his own agenda, such as avenging his lost love Anna Grant. Later, Avon realises that he cannot escape the Federation's reach and that he must, like Blake, resist them. In this respect, by the end of the fourth series Avon has replaced Blake.<sup>26</sup>

Classic films, such as the Western *The Magnificent Seven*, were an important influence upon *Blake's 7*. Chris Boucher incorporated lines from Westerns into the scripts, much to the delight of Paul Darrow, an enthusiast of the genre.<sup>27</sup> The final episode, "Blake", was inspired by *The Wild Bunch* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.<sup>28</sup> *Blake's 7* also drew inspiration from the classic British dystopian novels *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *When the Sleeper Wakes* by H. G. Wells.<sup>29</sup> This is most evident in the nature of the Federation, whose methods of dealing with Blake in the first episode, "The Way Back", including brainwashing and show trials. These are reminiscent of the way in which the USSR dealt with its dissidents.<sup>30</sup> Explorations of totalitarianism in the series are not confined to the Federation—totalitarian control through religion ("Cygnus Alpha"), genetics ("The Web") and technology ("Redemption") are also por-

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<sup>22</sup> See footnote 22.

<sup>23</sup> Bignell, Jonathan; O'Day, Andrew (2004). "Nation, Space and Politics". Terry Nation. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press. pp. 113–178. ISBN 978-0-7190-6547-7.

<sup>24</sup> Attwood, Tony (1982). "Interviews: Chris Boucher – Script Editor and Writer". *Blake's 7. The Programme Guide*. London: W.H. Allen. pp. 178–181. ISBN 0-426-19449-7.

<sup>25</sup> McCormack, Una (2006). "Resist the host: *Blake's 7* – a very British future". In Cook, John R.; Wright, Peter (eds.). *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker's Guide*. London: IB Tauris. pp. 174–192. ISBN 1-84511-048-X.

<sup>26</sup> Muir, John Kenneth (2000). "The Jurassic Arc: Science Fiction Television's First Video Novel". *A History and Critical Analysis of *Blake's 7*, the 1978-1981 British Television Space Adventure*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland. pp. 171–178. ISBN 0-7864-2660-8.

<sup>27</sup> Nazzaro, Joe; Wells, Sheelagh (1997). "Starting Out". *Blake's 7: The Inside Story*. London: Virgin. pp. 9–20. ISBN 0-7535-0044-2.

<sup>28</sup> Nazzaro, Joe (August 1992). "Terry Nation's *Blake's 7*. Part One". *TV Zone* (33): 28–30. ISSN 0957-3844.

<sup>29</sup> See footnote 24.

<sup>30</sup> Stevens, Alan; Moore, Fiona (2003). "Season A". *Liberation. The Unofficial and Unauthorised Guide to *Blake's 7**. England: Telos. pp. 13–58. ISBN 1-903889-54-5.



Figure II.3: The bridge of the Liberator in "Deliverance" (S1E12)

trayed.<sup>31</sup> Such authoritarian dystopias are common in Terry Nation's work, including his Doctor Who story *Genesis of the Daleks* (1975).<sup>32</sup>

Loyalty and trust are important themes of the series.<sup>33</sup> Avon is presented with several opportunities to abandon Blake. Many of Blake's schemes require co-operation and expertise from others. Characters are often betrayed by family and friends, especially Avon, whose former lover Anna Grant is eventually revealed to be a Federation agent. The theme of loyalty and trust reaches its maximum during Blake and Avon's final encounter in the last episode ("Blake"); Blake, by now very paranoid, has been masquerading as a bounty hunter collaborating with the Federation as a front for his activities in recruiting and testing potential allies in the struggle and this causes Avon and the others to suspect him when Tarrant accuses Blake of betraying them; an ironic miscommunication between Avon and Blake precipitates the disastrous events that conclude the episode.<sup>34</sup> If Blake and his crew represent Robin Hood and his Merry Men, then the Federation forces, personified by the obsessive, psychopathic Space Commander Travis and his superior, the beautiful but ruthless Supreme Commander Servalan, represent Guy of Gisbourne and the Sheriff of Nottingham.<sup>35</sup>

A common theme of Nation's science fiction is the depiction of post-apocalyptic societies, as in several of his Doctor Who serials, for example *The Daleks* (1963–64), *Death to the Daleks* (1974) and *The Android Invasion* (1975) and in his series *Survivors* (1975–77).<sup>36</sup> Post-apocalyptic societies feature in several Blake's 7 episodes including "Duel", "Deliverance", "City at the Edge of the World" and "Terminal". Although not explicitly stated, some publicity material for the series refers to the Federation as having developed after a nuclear holocaust on Earth.<sup>37</sup>

## PLOT SUMMARY

The series is set in a future age of interstellar travel and concerns the exploits of a group of outlaws. Gareth Thomas played the eponymous character Roj Blake, a political dissident who is arrested, tried and convicted on false charges, and then deported from Earth to a prison planet. En route, he and two fellow prisoners, treated as expendable, are sent to board and investigate an abandoned alien spacecraft found drifting in space. They get the ship working, commandeer it, rescue two more prisoners, and are later joined by an alien guerrilla with telepathic abilities. In their attempts to stay ahead of their enemies and inspire others to rebel, they encounter a great variety of cultures on different planets, and are forced to confront human and alien threats. Blake's group suffer losses and casualties, and recruit newer members to join them. They perform a campaign against the totalitarian Terran Federation until an intergalactic war occurs with aliens from the Andromeda galaxy. Blake disappears and Kerr Avon then leads the group. When their spacecraft is destroyed and another group member is killed, the survivors commandeer another craft (which they enhance with superior technology), and a secret base on a distant planet from which they continue their campaign. In the final episode, Avon finds Blake and, suspecting him of betraying the group, kills him. The group is then shot by Federation guards, who surround Avon in the final scene as shots are heard over the end credits.

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<sup>31</sup> See footnote 30.

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 22.

<sup>33</sup> See footnote 25.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 26.

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 21.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 22.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 30.



Figure II.4: Avon in "Duel" (S1E8)

## **SERIES ONE**

Roj Blake, a worker of high social status classified as "alpha-grade", lives in a domed city. Similar domes house most of the Earth's population. Blake is approached by a group of political dissidents who take him outside the city to meet their leader, Bran Foster. According to Foster, Blake was once the leader of an influential group of political activists opposed to the Federation's Earth Administration. Blake was arrested, brainwashed and coerced into making a confession denouncing the rebellion. His memory of those years was then blocked. Foster wants Blake to rejoin the dissidents. Suddenly, the meeting is interrupted by the arrival of Federation security forces, who shoot and kill the crowd of rebels. Blake, the only survivor, returns to the city, where he begins to remember his past. He is arrested, tried on false charges of child molestation and sentenced to deportation to the prison planet Cygnus Alpha.<sup>38</sup>

Whilst awaiting deportation from Planet Earth, Blake meets thief Vila Restal and smuggler Jenna Stannis. On board the prison ship London, Blake meets convicted murderer Olag Gan and computer engineer and embezzler Kerr Avon. The London encounters a battle between two alien space fleets and the London's crew plot a course to avoid the combat zone and continue their voyage. They encounter a strange alien craft, board it and attempt to salvage it but are thwarted by the alien ship's defence mechanism. The commander of the London sends the expendable Blake, Avon, and Jenna across to the ship. Blake defeats the defence system when

<sup>38</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Briant, Michael E. (director). (1978) "The Way Back" (Television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), Blake's 7, London: BBC, 2 January 1978

it tries to use memories he recently discovered were false. With Jenna as pilot, the three convicts escape in the alien craft.<sup>39</sup>

Blake and his crew follow the London to Cygnus Alpha in their captured ship, which they have named *Liberator*. They retrieve Vila and Gan, while Blake leaves the other prisoners. Blake wants to use *Liberator* and its new crew to attack the Federation with the others, especially Avon, as reluctant followers.<sup>40</sup> Blake's first target is a communications station on the planet Saurian Major. Blake infiltrates the station and is assisted by Cally, a telepathic guerrilla soldier from the planet Auron. Blake invites Cally to join the crew. With this new arrival, and including *Liberator*'s computer, Zen, *Liberator* has a crew of seven.<sup>41</sup>

As Blake's attacks against the Federation become bolder, he has less success. Political pressure grows on the Administration with planetary commanders threatening to leave the Federation because of its inability to protect them from Blake's attacks. Rumours abound about Blake's heroism and other rebel groups use his name for their actions. Supreme Commander Servalan appoints Space Commander Travis, who has a vendetta against Blake, to eliminate Blake and capture *Liberator*. Servalan often co-opts Travis for her personal projects and uses Blake as a cover for her own activities. When Travis repeatedly fails to eliminate Blake, Servalan does not assign the task to another officer and does not use more resources to eliminate him.<sup>42</sup>

Blake meets a man named Ensor and discovers a plot by Servalan and Travis to seize a powerful computer named Orac, which is capable of communicating with any computer that uses a component called a Taniel Cell. Blake's crew suffers from radiation sickness but capture the device before Servalan arrives. Blake offers to perform the operation to save Ensor's life aboard the *Liberator* but Ensor dies when the power cells for his artificial heart are depleted before they are able to reach *Liberator*. Aboard the ship, Orac predicts the craft's destruction in the near future.<sup>43</sup>

## **SERIES TWO**

The *Liberator* is recaptured by the people that built it and Orac's prophecy is fulfilled when it destroys an identical space vehicle.<sup>44</sup> Blake wants to attack the heart of the Federation and he targets the main computer control facility on Earth. Avon agrees to help on condition that Blake gives him *Liberator* when the Federation has been destroyed. Blake, Avon, Vila and Gan reach the control facility and find an empty room. Travis reveals that the computer facility was secretly relocated years before and the old location was left as a decoy. Blake and his crew escape but Travis throws a grenade in the confined area and Gan is killed by falling rubble.<sup>45</sup>

After Gan's death, Blake considers the future of the rebellion, and Travis is convicted of war crimes by a Federation court martial at Space Command Headquarters aboard a space station. Blake decides to restore his group's reputation and attacks

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<sup>39</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Roberts, Pennant (director). (1978) "Space Fall" (Television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 9 January 1978

<sup>40</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Lorrimer, Vere (director). (1978) "Cygnus Alpha" (Television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 16 January 1978

<sup>41</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Roberts, Pennant (director). (1978) "Time Squad" (Television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 23 January 1978

<sup>42</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Lorrimer, Vere (director). (1978) "Seek-Locate-Destroy" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 6 February 1978

<sup>43</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Lorrimer, Vere (director). (1978) "Orac" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 27 March 1978

<sup>44</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Lorrimer, Vere (director). (1979) "Redemption" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 1 September 1979

<sup>45</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Spenton-Foster, George (director). (1979) "Pressure Point" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 9 February 1979

the space station but Travis escapes and continues his vendetta against Blake.<sup>46</sup> Blake seeks the new location of the computer control facility. He learns that it is named Star One.<sup>47</sup> When Star One begins to malfunction, Servalan also becomes desperate to find its location. The facility's failure causes many problems in the Federation. Star One controls a large defensive barrier that has prevented extra-galactic incursions. Blake discovers Star One's location and finds that, with help from Travis, aliens from the Andromeda Galaxy have infiltrated it. Vila discovers a fleet of alien spacecraft beyond the barrier. Travis partially disables the barrier. Blake and his crew overcome the aliens at Star One and kill Travis but the gap in the barrier allows the aliens to invade. Jenna calls for help from the Federation, where Servalan has conducted a military coup, imposed martial law and declared herself President. Servalan dispatches the Federation's battle fleets to repel the invaders, who begin to breach the barrier. With Blake badly wounded, Liberator by Avon's direction, alone until Servalan's battle fleets arrive, fights against the aliens.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Boucher, Chris (writer) & Martinus, Derek (director). (1979) "Trial" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), Blake's 7, London: BBC, 13 February 1979

<sup>47</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Lorrimer, Vere (director). (1979) "Countdown" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), Blake's 7, London: BBC, 6 March 1979

<sup>48</sup>Boucher, Chris (writer) & Maloney, David (director — uncredited). (1979) "Star One" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), Blake's 7, London: BBC, 3 April 1979



Figure II.5: Space Command headquarters in "Deliverance" (S1E12)



Figure II.6: Federation troopers in "The Way Back" (S1E1)

### **SERIES THREE**

Liberator is severely damaged during the battle with the Andromedans, forcing the crew to abandon ship whilst Zen carries out repairs. The Federation defeats the alien invaders but the cost considerably reduces its influence in the galaxy.<sup>49</sup> Blake and Jenna go missing and Avon becomes the new leader. Two new additions, weapons expert Dayna Mellanby and mercenary Del Tarrant, join the crew.<sup>50</sup> Avon is less inclined than Blake to attack the Federation but Servalan realises that if she captures Liberator, the Federation will quickly restore its former power.<sup>51</sup>

Servalan attempts to create clones of herself, but is thwarted when the embryos are destroyed.<sup>52</sup> Avon decides to find the Federation agent who killed Anna Grant, his former lover. The group interrupts an attempt to eliminate Servalan and Avon discovers that Anna is alive and was previously a Federation agent named Bartolemew. Anna tries to shoot Avon in the back but Avon kills her and frees Servalan.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Lorrimer, Vere (director). (1980) "Aftermath" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 7 January 1980

<sup>50</sup>Nation, Terry (writer) & Maloney, David (director — uncredited). (1980) "Powerplay" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 7 January 1980

<sup>51</sup>Prior, Allan (writer) & McCarthy, Desmond (director). (1980) "Volcano" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 14 January 1980

<sup>52</sup>Parkes, Roger (writer) & Morgan, Andrew (director). (1980) "Children of Auron" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 19 February 1980

<sup>53</sup>Boucher, Chris (writer) & Cumming, Fiona (director). (1980) "Rumours of Death" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 25 February 1980

Servalan lures Avon into a trap using a faked message from Blake. Servalan finally captures Liberator and maroons the crew on an artificial planet named Terminal but does not know that Liberator has been irreparably damaged after flying through a cloud of corrosive fluid particles. As Servalan leaves Terminal, the ship explodes and Servalan is apparently killed as she attempts to escape by teleporting away.<sup>54</sup>

## **SERIES FOUR**

Scorpio, the Wanderer class cargo ship used for series 4. Booby traps, set by Servalan in her underground complex on Terminal, explode and Cally is killed. Avon, Tarrant, Vila and Dayna escape with Orac and are rescued by Dorian, a salvage operator. Dorian takes the crew in his spacecraft, Scorpio, to his base on the planet Xenon, where they meet his partner, Soolin. Dorian plans to drain the crew's life-force and take Orac but is foiled by Vila.<sup>55</sup> Avon completes a new teleport system for Scorpio using the technology left behind by Dorian. Soolin joins the crew and they commandeer Scorpio and occupy the Xenon base. Avon gains control of Slave, Scorpio's main computer.<sup>56</sup>

The crew acquires an experimental new stardrive that vastly increases Scorpio's speed, making it even faster than Liberator.<sup>57</sup> The Scorpio crew become concerned about the speed at which the Federation is reclaiming its former territory and discover that Servalan survived the destruction of Liberator. Deposed as President of the Federation, she is using the pseudonym Commissioner Sleer and is enacting a pacification programme using a drug named Pylene-50. The Scorpio crew gain the formula for an antidote to Pylene-50 but this cannot reverse the drug's effects. Avon finds a way to synthesise the antidote and the crew attempt to create an alliance between independent worlds to resist the Federation and get the resources and manpower to mass-produce the Pylene-50 antidote. One of the alliance members, Zukan, betrays the alliance to Servalan and detonates explosives on Xenon base, which is damaged and the Scorpio crew are forced to abandon it.<sup>58</sup>

Avon tells the rest of the group that Orac has traced Blake to Gauda Prime, an agricultural planet. Blake is masquerading as a bounty hunter; his latest quarry is Arlen, whom he hopes to recruit for his rebellion. Scorpio approaches Gauda Prime and is attacked. The crew, except Tarrant, use the teleport to abandon the damaged craft. Slave is damaged, Tarrant remains aboard to pilot Scorpio and is injured during a crash landing. Blake arrives, rescues and takes Tarrant to his base and purportedly captures Tarrant as bounty. Tarrant thinks that Blake has betrayed the group and Blake lets Tarrant escape. Tarrant is nearly killed by Blake's colleagues when Avon and his crew save him, giving credence to Tarrant's accusation that Blake has betrayed them to the Federation. Becoming very suspicious of Blake, Avon kills him. Arlen reveals that she is a Federation officer and Federation guards arrive. Tarrant, Soolin, Vila, and Dayna are shot by Federation troops, who slowly surround Avon

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<sup>54</sup> Nation, Terry (writer) & Ridge, Mary (director). (1980) "Terminal" (television series episode). In Maloney, David (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 31 March 1980

<sup>55</sup> Boucher, Chris (writer) & Ridge, Mary (director). (1981) "Rescue" (television series episode). In Lorrimer, Vere (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 28 September 1981

<sup>56</sup> Steed, Ben (writer) & Ridge, Mary (director). (1981) "Power" (television series episode). In Lorrimer, Vere (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 5 October 1981

<sup>57</sup> Follet, Jim (writer) & Proudfoot, David Sullivan (director). (1981) "Stardrive" (television series episode). In Lorrimer, Vere (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 19 October 1981

<sup>58</sup> Masters, Simon (writer) & Ritelis, Viktors (director). (1981) "Warlord" (television series episode). In Lorrimer, Vere (producer), *Blake's 7*, London: BBC, 14 December 1981

with their weapons pointed at him. Avon steps over Blake's body, raises his gun and smiles. Shots are heard over the end credits.<sup>59</sup>



Figure II.7: The crew of the Liberator in "Redemption" (S2E1)

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<sup>59</sup> Boucher, Chris (writer) & Ridge, Mary (director). (1981) "Blake" (television series episode). In Lorrimer, Vere (producer), Blake's 7, London: BBC, 21 December 1981

# History

**M**ANY FANS OF THE SERIES will find the production history, filming locations, sound engineering, and critical reception of the series interesting.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

Terry Nation had the idea for Blake's 7 in a moment of inspiration during a pitch meeting with Ronnie Marsh, a BBC drama executive. Marsh was intrigued and immediately commissioned a pilot script. When he had seen the draft, Marsh approved Blake's 7 for full development.<sup>1</sup> David Maloney, an experienced BBC director, was assigned to produce the series and Chris Boucher was engaged as script editor. Nation was commissioned to write the thirteen episodes. Boucher's task was to expand and develop Nation's first drafts into workable scripts, but this became increasingly difficult as Nation started running out of ideas. Meanwhile, Maloney was struggling with the low budget available given the need for action and special effects. Despite these challenges Blake's 7 was very popular, with some episodes exceeding ten million viewers. A second series was quickly commissioned.<sup>2</sup>

The BBC engaged new writers for the subsequent series. It was decided that one of the regular characters should die, to demonstrate that Blake and his crew were not invincible. Gan, played by David Jackson, was chosen because Gan had been under-used and was the least popular character. Although ratings declined compared to the first series, the BBC commissioned a third.<sup>3</sup> When Gareth Thomas and Sally Knyvette decided not to return, new characters were required so that the story could continue without its titular character. Suggestions for a replacement actor for Blake were rejected and Avon became more prominent in the story. New characters Del Tarrant, portrayed by Steven Pacey, and Dayna Mellanby, portrayed by Josette Simon, were introduced.<sup>4</sup>

Blake's 7 was not expected to be recommissioned after the third series and there was surprise when during 1980 a further series was announced as the third series ended. Bill Cotton, BBC Head of Television, had watched Terminal and enjoyed it greatly. He telephoned the presentation department and ordered them to make the announcement.<sup>5</sup> As David Maloney was unavailable, Vere Lorrimer became the producer. He introduced new characters, a new spacecraft Scorpio and its computer Slave. Jan Chappell (who played Cally) decided that she did not want to return, and was replaced by Glynis Barber as Soolin.

Gareth Thomas made a final appearance as Blake and insisted that his character be killed in a definitive manner. Although the fourth series performed satisfactorily in the ratings, Blake's 7 was not renewed again and the final episode had an ambiguous finale. Except for Blake, whose death was contractual, the characters were shown being attacked in such a way that their survival would have been possible had a fifth series been commissioned. The final episode, titled "Blake", was broadcast on 21 December 1981.<sup>6</sup>

Although Blake's 7 never crossed over with Doctor Who during its initial run, Gareth Thomas was open to the idea as he was close friends with Doctor Who star

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<sup>1</sup>Pixley, Andrew (1995). Blake's 7 Summer Special. ISSN 1353-761X

<sup>2</sup>See footnote 60.

<sup>3</sup>See footnote 60.

<sup>4</sup>See footnote 60.

<sup>5</sup>See footnote 5.

<sup>6</sup>See footnote 60.



Figure III.1: Federation ships in "Duel" (S1E8)

Tom Baker, and the two wanted to be 'briefly crossing paths' with one another before going their separate ways. Ultimately, the idea was scrapped.<sup>7</sup>

## FILMING LOCATIONS

Interior spaceship sets and other indoor scenes were recorded on videotape at BBC Television Centre, Shepherd's Bush in London. For indoor complexes, such as bases or command centre bunkers, filming often took place in local power plants and water turbine stations. Location shooting was also extensive with shooting occurring mostly in southern England. Notable location shots include episode eleven, of the first series, "Bounty", where the production was filmed at Quex Park in Kent. The Waterloo Tower in Quex Park was ex-president Sarkoff's residence in exile.<sup>8</sup>

The series also used Betchworth Quarry as the surface of an alien planet and Wookey Hole Caves as the site of an alien mine. Additional location shooting took place at Black Park, New Forest, South Bank, Camden Town and Wembley Conference Centre.

## MUSIC AND SOUND EFFECTS

Blake's 7's theme music was written by Australian composer Dudley Simpson, who had composed music for Doctor Who for more than ten years. The same recording of Simpson's theme was used for the beginning titles of all four series of the pro-

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<sup>7</sup>Morgan Jeffrey (14 April 2016). "Gareth Thomas and Tom Baker wanted Blake's 7 to crossover with Doctor Who". Digital Spy. Retrieved 11 February 2019.

<sup>8</sup>Kent Film Office (20 October 1978). "Kent Film Office Blake's 7 Article"

gramme.<sup>9</sup> For the fourth series, a new recording was made for the closing credits that used an easy listening-style arrangement.<sup>10</sup> Simpson also provided the incidental music for all of the episodes except for the Series One episode "Duel" and the Series Two episode "Gambit". "Duel" was directed by Douglas Camfield, who had a grudge against Simpson and refused to work with him, and so Camfield used library music.<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Parker provided the music and sound effects for "Gambit". Blake's 7 made considerable use of audio effects that are described in the credits as "special sound". Many electronically generated sound effects were used, ranging from foley-style effects for props including handguns, teleport sounds, spacecraft engines, flight console buttons and background atmospheres. The special sounds for Blake's 7 were provided by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop composers Richard Yeoman-Clark and Elizabeth Parker.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Blake's 7 received both positive and negative reviews. The fourth episode *Time Squad* review by Stanley Reynolds of *The Times* stated, "... nice to hear the youngsters holding their breath in anticipation of a little terror". Reynolds elaborated, "Television science fiction has got too self-consciously jokey lately. It is also nice to have each episode complete within itself, while still carrying on the saga of Blake's struggle against the 1984-ish Federation. But is that dark-haired telepathic alien girl, the latest addition to Blake's outer-space merry men, going to spell love trouble for blonde Jenna? Maid Marian never had that trouble in Sherwood Forest."<sup>12</sup>

In January 1998 Robert Hanks of *The Independent* compared the series' ethos to that of *Star Trek*. He wrote "If you wanted to sum up the relative position of Britain and America in this century — the ebbing away of the pink areas of the map, the fading of national self-confidence as Uncle Sam proceeded to colonise the globe with fizzy drinks and Hollywood — you could do it like this: they had *Star Trek*, we had *Blake's 7* ... No 'boldly going' here: instead, we got the boot stamping on a human face which George Orwell offered as a vision of humanity's future in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*". Hanks concluded that "*Blake's 7* has acquired a credibility and popularity *Terry Nation* can never have expected ... I think it's to do with the sheer crappiness of the series and the crappiness it attributes to the universe: it is science-fiction for the disillusioned and ironic — and that is what makes it so very British."<sup>13</sup>

Gavin Collinson of the British Film Institute's website *Screenonline* wrote "*The premise of Blake's 7* held nothing remotely original. The outlaw group resisting a powerful and corrupt regime is an idea familiar from *Robin Hood* and beyond." He added "*Blake's 7*'s triumph lay in its vivid characters, its tight, pacy plots and its satisfying realism...For arguably the first time since the 1950s *Quatermass* serials, the BBC had created a popular sci-fi/fantasy show along adult lines". His review concludes "Ultimately, the one force the rebels could not overcome proved to be the BBC's long-standing apathy towards science fiction. However, the bloody finale, in which Avon murders Blake, exemplified the programme's strengths — fearless narratives, credible but surprising character development and an enormous sense

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<sup>9</sup>Chris Brimelow. "Dudley Simpson Discography". Archived from the original on 29 February 2008.

<sup>10</sup>Details largely taken from documentary included *Blake's 7* series 4 DVD

<sup>11</sup>"*Doctor Who Magazine* issue 259, 17 December 1997 in *Dr. Who/Douglas Camfield*". All Experts. 12 July 2005. Archived from the original on 30 March 2012. Retrieved 17 January 2012.

<sup>12</sup>Reynolds, Stanley (24 January 1978). "Blake's Seven - BBC!". *The Times*. p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Hanks, Robert (15 January 1998). "A Very British Space Crew". *The Independent*. London: Independent Digital News and Media Limited. p. 3. Archived from the original on 4 September 2015. Retrieved 17 January 2007.

of fun"<sup>14</sup> In 2015 Tim Stanley of *The Daily Telegraph* described the series as "oft-derided" and "gloriously low budget" but "a genuine classic". He added "this was superior drama performed by consummate professionals who made it believable by being 100 per cent committed to the material. Blake's 7's sets and dresses were bright and gaudy but it was dark, dark melodrama." Stanley concluded "Blake's 7 can be read as a document of the Callaghan/Carter years with their piles of rubbish in the streets. Then along came Thatcher/Reagan and sci-fi turned hopeful again. Cue *Star Wars* and its childish universe of Wookiees and Ewoks. Moral clarity returned. The budgets ballooned. But, for my money, it was nowhere near as interesting."<sup>15</sup>

The Australian broadcaster and critic Clive James gave a negative appraisal, calling it " ... classically awful British television SF ... no apostrophe in the title, no sense in the plot". He continued "The depraved space queen Servalan ... could never quite bring herself to volatilize the dimly heroic Blake even when she had him square in the sights of her plasmatic spasm guns. The secret of Blake's appeal, or Blakes appeal, for the otherwise infallibly fatale Servalan remained a mystery, like the actual wattage of light bulb on which the design of Blake's spaceship, or Blakes spaceship, was plainly based".<sup>16</sup> Screenwriter Nigel Kneale, whose work included *The Quatermass Experiment* and other science fiction, was also critical. He described "the very few bits I've seen" as "paralytically awful", saying that "the dialogue/characterisation seemed to consist of a kind of childish squabbling".<sup>17</sup>

## LEGACY

Blake's 7 deviates from the good-versus-evil dualism in *Star Wars*; *Star Trek*'s 'feel-good' future; and the episodic structure of *Doctor Who*.<sup>18</sup> Blake's 7 also influenced *Hyperdrive* and *Aeon Flux*.<sup>19</sup> It has also been alleged to have influenced *Farscape* and *Firefly*, albeit Joss Whedon denied that it had been a conscious influence on the latter.<sup>20</sup> Television playwright Dennis Potter's final work *Cold Lazarus* was inspired by the show.<sup>21</sup>

Blake's 7 remains fairly well regarded. A poll of United States science-fiction writers, fans and critics for John Javna's 1987 book *The Best of Science Fiction* placed the series 25th in popularity, despite then only having recently begun to be broadcast in the US.<sup>22</sup> A similar poll in Britain conducted for *SFX* magazine during 1999 put Blake's 7 at 16th place, with the magazine commenting that "twenty years on, TV SF is still mapping the paths first explored by Terry Nation's baby".<sup>23</sup> During 2005

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<sup>14</sup>Gavin Collinson. "BFI Screenonline: Blake's 7 (1978-81)". British Film Institute. Archived from the original on 29 June 2011. Retrieved 25 April 2009.

<sup>15</sup>Stanley, Tim (5 June 2015). "Blake's 7: the low-budget late 70s British sci-fi is now a genuine classic". *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved 31 August 2020.

<sup>16</sup>James, Clive (14 December 2005). "Clive James's literary education in sludge fiction". *The Times*. Times Newspapers L.t.d. Archived from the original on 10 February 2008. Retrieved 1 September 2008.

<sup>17</sup>Pixley, Andrew; Nigel Kneale (1986). "Nigel Kneale—Behind the Dark Door". *The Quatermass Home Page*. Archived from the original on 17 August 2005. Retrieved 2 June 2014.

<sup>18</sup>See footnote 13.

<sup>19</sup>"Forever Avon" special feature on the Blakes 7 series 4 UK DVD.

<sup>20</sup>Horáková, Erin (22 August 2016). "Boucher, Backbone and Blake – the legacy of Blakes 7". *Strange Horizons*. Retrieved 13 July 2023.

<sup>21</sup>Stevens, Alan; Moore, Fiona (2003). "Afterword". *Liberation. The Unofficial and Unauthorised Guide to Blake's 7*. England: Telos. pp. 199–200. ISBN 1-903889-54-5.

<sup>22</sup>Muir, John Kenneth (2000). "Critical Reception". *A History and Critical Analysis of Blake's 7, the 1978-1981 British Television Space Adventure*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland. pp. 25–26. ISBN 0-7864-2660-8.

<sup>23</sup>Golder, Dave, ed. (April 1999). "The Top 50 SF TV Shows of All Time". *SFX* (supplement to issue 50): 14.

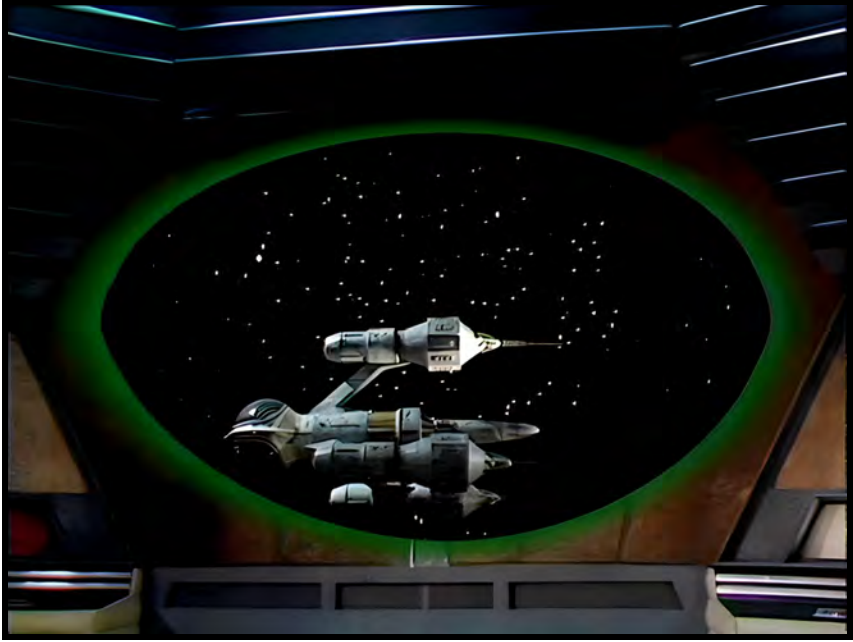


Figure III.2: Liberator display showing a Liberator-class ship. in "Redemption" (S2E1)

SFX surveyed readers' top 50 British telefantasy shows of all time, and *Blake's 7* was placed at number four behind *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Red Dwarf* and *Doctor Who*.<sup>24</sup> A similar poll conducted by *TV Zone* magazine during 2003 for the top 100 cult television programmes scored *Blake's 7* 11th.<sup>25</sup>

Dutch musician Arjen Anthony Lucassen was inspired by *Blake's 7* in naming his side-project *Star One*.<sup>26</sup>

In 2004 a 15-minute comedy short entitled "*Blake's Junction 7*" debuted at several film festivals around the world. It was directed by Ben Gregor, written by Tim Plester, and featured Mackenzie Crook, Martin Freeman, Johnny Vegas, Mark Heap and Peter Tuddenham. This parody depicted the characters taking a break at the Newport Pagnell motorway service area.<sup>27</sup> During 2006 the BBC produced a 30-minute documentary *The Cult of... Blake's 7* that was first broadcast on 12 December on BBC Four, as part of a *Science Fiction Britannia* series.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Bradley, Dave, ed. (2005). "The Top 50 Greatest UK Telefantasy Shows Ever". *SFX Collection* (22): 50–51.

<sup>25</sup>Spilsbury, Tom (June 2003). "The Top 100 Cult TV Shows Ever". *TV Zone* (163): 21–27.

<sup>26</sup>"Arjen Lucassen website". Arjenlucassen.com. 1 November 2010. Archived from the original on 23 July 2011. Retrieved 15 December 2010.

<sup>27</sup>"Review: *Blake's Junction 7*". *BBC Cult*. BBC. 23 September 2004. Archived from the original on 16 October 2006. Retrieved 9 December 2006. Also see Leigh Singer (20 August 2004). "Little things we like: *Blake's Junction 7*". *Guardian Unlimited Arts*. Retrieved 26 January 2012.

<sup>28</sup>Stevens, Toby; Tyler, Alan (Executive Producers) & Followell, Tony (Director) (12 December 2006). *The Cult of... Blake's 7*. BBC Scotland (Television programme). United Kingdom.



Figure IV.1: Jenna and Avon in "Bounty" (S1E11)

## Setting Guide

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IN THIS CHAPTER we'll look at the setting of the Blake's 7 universe, its government, technology, and worlds.

### **SOCIETY**

Let's take a look at the various organizations at play in this setting, as well as the criminal underbelly that thrives in this dystopian universe.

#### **THE TERRAN FEDERATION**

For over two centuries, the iron grip of the Terran Federation has tightened its hold across the galaxy, amassing dominion through military might and intricate political maneuvering. This totalitarian regime maintains its ruthless authority by resorting to extreme measures, including the ruthless execution of dissenters and the perpetual drugging of its population into blind obedience. In cases where execution proves unnecessary, the Federation employs memory implants and behavioral modifications to eliminate any lingering thoughts of defiance.

At the apex of the Federation's hierarchy stands the President, governing alongside the High Council. Beneath the President's leadership, the Supreme Commander wields considerable influence over the central pillar of Federation control—the vast military might of Space Command. The current Supreme Commander, the power-hungry and ruthless Commissioner Servalan, is the embodiment of the Federation's oppressive rule.

## **THE ADMINISTRATION**

Serving as the civil and bureaucratic core of the Federation, the Administration theoretically holds sway over all other arms of the government, including the military. However, the pursuit of power is a recurring theme within the Federation, often leading to internal rivalries. Central Control, a heavily fortified and enigmatic computer complex, once held sway over decision-making and strategy. Still, its true functions have long been shifted to a remote, undisclosed location, with Central Control now serving as a tantalizing bait for potential revolutionaries.

## **SPACE COMMAND**

Space Command forms the martial arm of the Federation, falling nominally under the jurisdiction of the Administration. Yet, within the military's ranks, many consider themselves the true wielders of power in the Federation. Victories are cynically utilized to accumulate political influence, while any setbacks are conveniently ascribed to the irrational demands of the Administration.

The public face of Federation control manifests through the ominous, black-clad shock troopers who enforce the regime's laws with unwavering brutality and obedience. Although most of these troops consist of ordinary citizens, some are transformed into emotionless, cybernetically enhanced Mutoids. These unfeeling, superhuman drones possess enhanced strength and endurance, nourishing themselves on blood serum and sating their thirst via wrist-mounted hypodermic needles. The disdainful term "vampires" is frequently applied by humans to Mutoids, who reciprocate by referring to their unmodified counterparts as "unmodifieds."

## **CENTRAL SECURITY**

Beneath the facade of overt Federation machinery lies a clandestine web of intelligence agents, omnipresent and inscrutable. In this shadowy realm, trust is a scarce commodity, as the mantra persists: "Trust nobody!"

## **CENTRAL SCIENCE AND THE ACADEMIES**

Within the Federation, scientific endeavors are invariably geared toward the development of methods for control and dominion. These pursuits encompass the creation of drugs and memory modifications that pacify the population, as well as the design of weaponry capable of crushing dissent, including biological and chemical warfare.

## **CRIME**

Operating in the depths of society, organized crime thrives under the malevolent oversight of the Terra Nostra. This criminal syndicate, wielding authority over the distribution of Shadow, an addictive and pernicious narcotic, operates clandestinely. In a dark twist of fate, the Chairman of the Terra Nostra also serves as the President of the Federation, blurring the line between crime and governance. Within the Federation, human trafficking is rampant, and in numerous regions, slavery remains legally sanctioned. Families of deserters are routinely consigned to lives of servitude, perpetuating the cycle of oppression and exploitation.

## **THE REBELS**

Amidst the stifling grip of the Federation and its relentless campaign to suppress all forms of dissent, a glimmer of resistance continues to burn, even on Earth itself. One of these sparks of rebellion takes shape as the clandestine Freedom Party, an underground insurrectionist group dedicated to challenging the Federation's tyranny. The most renowned cell within the party is led by a young and fiery idealist named Roj Blake. However, Blake's audacity eventually leads to his betrayal and capture by Federation agents.

Yet, the Federation, wary of turning Blake into a martyr, chooses an alternative approach. As a seeming gesture of magnanimity, his loyal followers and family are exiled to the desolate Outer Worlds, only to meet a grim fate upon their arrival—they are executed. Meanwhile, Blake's own personality and memories are subjected to insidious modifications, erasing his rebellious spirit and replacing it with a false vow to help capture his fellow rebels. Following his coerced confession, Blake's memory is systematically cleansed of any trace of his resistance, and he is granted a new life on Earth.

Four years later, rebel forces succeed in locating Blake, leading him to a fateful encounter with Bran Foster, the charismatic leader of another insurrectionist faction. It is during this meeting that Blake learns the horrifying truth: his brother and sister, whom he believed had relocated to Ziegler 5, were among those ruthlessly executed upon their arrival in the Outer Worlds. To add to the deception, the messages Blake had been receiving from them were nothing but clever forgeries.

During the clandestine gathering of the rebel group, the Federation's relentless soldiers launch a brutal attack, leaving a trail of death in their wake. Only Blake and Dev Tarrant, an Outer Worlds Security officer who Blake soon realizes had been the one to betray him initially, manage to escape. Blake finds himself charged with fabricated evidence of corrupt deeds meant to discredit him, swiftly convicted in a sham trial, and condemned to lifelong exile on the remote planet Cygnus Alpha.

Blake embarks on a journey away from Earth aboard the prison ship London, yet he refuses to surrender to his grim fate. With remarkable swiftness, Blake unites fellow convicts, including the talented pilot and smuggler Jenna Stannis and Kerr Avon, a brilliant computer expert with an embezzling past. Together, they seize control of the ship's computer systems. However, Blake's conscience prevents him from idly watching as the merciless first officer of the London executes their fellow conspirators. Blake ultimately surrenders, leading to a death sentence alongside Avon and Jenna for their roles in the revolt.

But fate has other plans in store. The London stumbles upon a drifting alien vessel, a discovery that alters the course of their destinies. In a desperate bid for life, Blake, Avon, and Jenna agree to venture aboard the alien ship in exchange for the quashing of their death sentences. Once on board, Blake masterminds a daring coup, wresting control of the highly advanced alien vessel from its enigmatic clutches.

With the acquisition of their new vessel, the Liberator, Blake makes a resolute decision—to rekindle his campaign against the Federation. His first objective: the liberation of his fellow prisoners on Cygnus Alpha. Yet, success eludes him, as he only manages to rescue two of his former co-conspirators from the London. Vila Restal, a compulsive thief well-versed in security systems, and Olag Gan, a behemoth of a man charged with murdering a Federation guard who had assaulted his lover.

Blake's first significant blow against the Federation occurs on Saurian Major, where he orchestrates a successful assault on a Federation communications facility. There, he recruits Cally, a formidable alien guerrilla fighter gifted with telepathic abilities. In the wake of this daring assault, Blake initiates a relentless campaign of strikes against the Federation, consistently eluding their efforts to eliminate him and capture the elusive Liberator.

With their indomitable spirit and unwavering determination, Blake and his diverse crew emerge as a symbol of resistance, a powerful beacon that inspires others to rise against the Federation's oppressive reign. The question now looms: Will you answer the call and join the ranks of those who dare to defy the Federation's control, fighting for freedom in the face of overwhelming odds?

## TECHNOLOGY

In the dystopian galaxy of Blake's 7, technology plays a pivotal role in the power struggle between the Federation and the rebels. Here are some of the technological marvels and innovations that shape this perilous universe:

**Anti-Grav Girots:** Essential for spacecraft, these vertical landing systems enable vessels to navigate and land with precision, defying gravitational forces.

**Artificial Telepathy Transmitter:** A mind control device with interstellar capabilities, provided there's enough power to drive it. It's a tool that the Federation wields with ruthless precision.

**Auto-Repair:** Automated repair systems are standard on Federation ships and the Liberator. They're also integrated into the high-intensity radiation grid guarding Central Control on Earth, making repairs a swift and efficient process.

**Carrier-Beam:** A super-fast interstellar communication method utilized by Orac, surpassing even the speed of standard hyperspace sub-beam communication.

**Chronicle Disks:** These data storage devices house a wealth of information, vital for the functioning of various technologies and systems.

**Circuit Integrator:** A device capable of bypassing security monitors, crucial for rebels attempting covert operations.

**Computers:** Ubiquitous calculating and thinking machines populate this universe. While some respond to speech and communicate vocally, true artificial intelligence remains a rare and elusive achievement.



Figure IV.2: Servalan's L-type cruiser in "Assassin" (S4E7)

**Diagnostic Analyser:** A crucial medical tool for diagnosis and treatment in a world where survival often depends on staying one step ahead of the Federation's relentless pursuit.

**Disorienter:** An interrogation device used by the Federation, its prolonged exposure can prove fatal, making it a terrifying instrument of coercion.

**Energy Isolator:** This device selectively disables electronic systems, a formidable tool that both the Federation and the rebels seek to control.

**Feldon Crystals:** The backbone of the Federation's power generation, these energy-focusing crystals are exceedingly rare and virtually indestructible, making them highly sought-after commodities.

**Force Fields:** Various forms of energy barriers, with force walls capable of shielding entire planets from danger and intrusion.

**IMIPAK:** A unique weapon that projects an unstable potential onto any living thing, marking the target for instant destruction, even from a million miles away. IMIPAK stands for 'Induced Molecular Instability Projector and Key.'

**Intensive Brain Therapy Chamber:** A device designed to suppress memories and implant new beliefs and ideas, a sinister tool the Federation employs for its own ends.

**Ionic Beam:** A weapon that disrupts a craft's instrumentation, rendering it vulnerable to attack.

**Judgement Machine:** Utilized in Federation courts, this device assimilates evidence from both defense and prosecution, providing swift and final judgments.

**Laser Lance:** An energy cutting tool essential for various tasks in this advanced technological age.

**Laser Probe:** A specialized tool for adjusting and fine-tuning circuitry, vital for maintaining and repairing advanced equipment.

**Lie Detector:** A device designed to detect falsehoods, serving as a critical instrument for interrogations.

**Limiter:** Brain-implanted devices that prevent individuals from committing deadly acts, inflicting intense pain as a deterrent.

**Link Clamp:** An indispensable tool for isolating elements within circuits, effectively disabling targeted devices.

**Magnetic Barrier:** A planetary defense field capable of atomizing ships without demagnetized hulls, a formidable safeguard against intrusion.

**Magnetic Probe:** A micro-manipulation tool for intricate tasks requiring precision.

**Medi-Capsule:** Cryogenic stasis capsules used to stabilize critically injured individuals, vital for those who find themselves in the line of fire.

**Microwave Transmitter:** A remote activation device, a tool that rebels and the Federation both deploy strategically.

**Molecular Shift Detector:** A device that detects the kinetic energy displacement associated with teleportation, a technology both rebels and Federation agents employ.

**Orac:** A supercomputer developed by the genius Ensor, equipped with the groundbreaking Tariel Chip. It can draw on the knowledge banks of any computer fitted with the chip, though its irascible temperament mirrors its creator's.

**Petroscope:** A device instrumental in detecting Dynamon crystals and other valuable minerals in the treacherous landscape of this galaxy.

**Proximity Mines:** Small orbital mines, virtually undetectable until they explode, serving as a perilous surprise for any approaching vessel.

**Respirator:** A life-saving breathing device designed for inhospitable environments, crucial in a universe teeming with danger.

**Resuscitation Capsule:** These oblong chambers are vital for treating unconscious patients, offering a glimmer of hope amidst the chaos of conflict.

**Robots:** In this highly advanced society, the Federation employs security robots at critical facilities, while service robots are common in all high-tech settings.

**Sealing Gel:** A safety mechanism on certain ships that fills the void between inner and outer bulkheads with solidifying sealing gel, swiftly responding to breaches in the outer hull.

**Teleport:** A technology that enables the instantaneous transmission of living matter. While the Federation's attempts to perfect it have failed, functioning teleportation systems exist and play a pivotal role in the rebels' operations.

**Thermal Suits:** Environmental suits capable of supporting life in sub-freezing temperatures, a necessity for rebels operating in extreme conditions.

**Time Distort (TD):** The method by which ships can exceed the speed of light, with speeds measured in multiplications of Time Distort. For example, TD5 indicates a fivefold acceleration beyond the speed of light.

**Traction Beam:** A device designed for capturing ships and objects, compelling them to follow a straight-line trajectory.

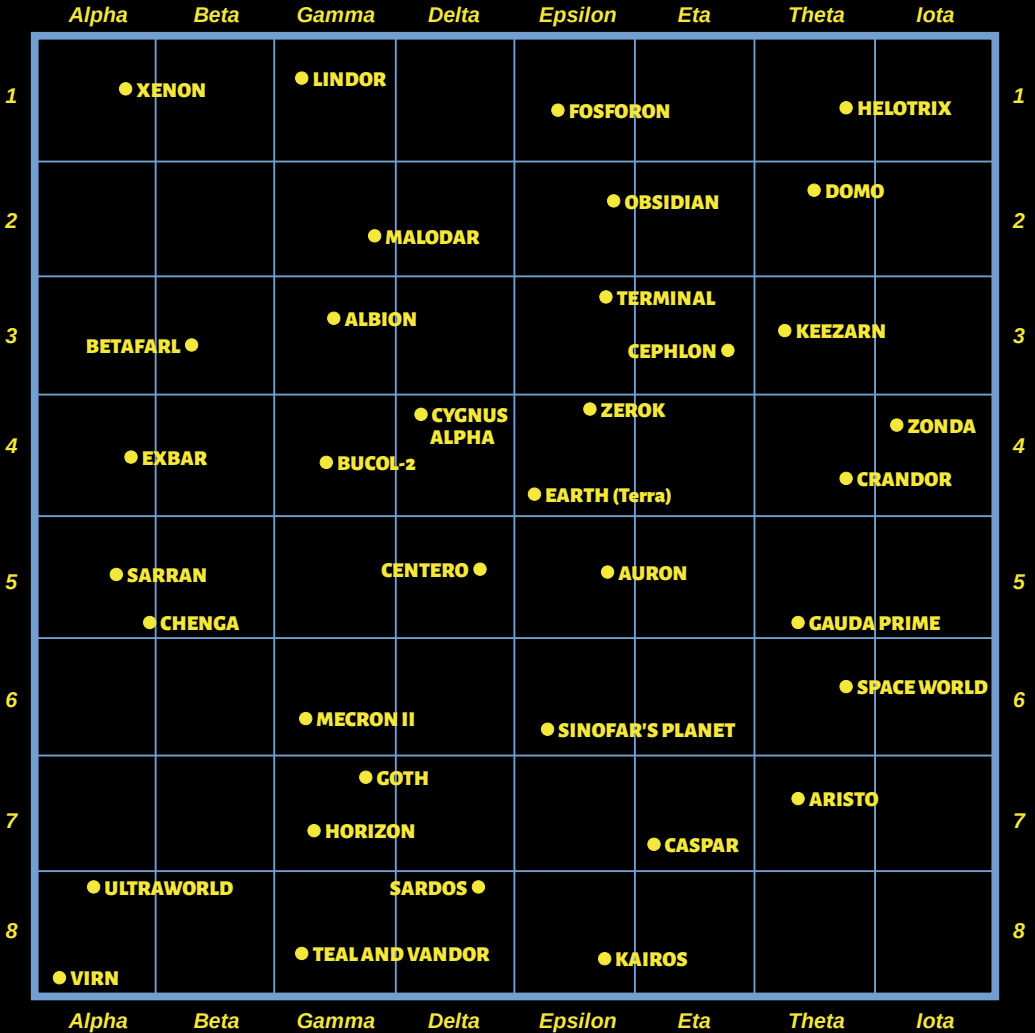
**Visual-Image Structuralizer:** A device capable of creating convincing fake visual recordings, often combined with voice synthesizers and vocabulary banks to create highly persuasive illusions.

**Zeta-3 Particles:** Federation communications are converted into zeta-3 particles, which are subsequently scrambled to form an unbreakable code without the need for a cipher machine—a crucial tool in the Federation's quest for control and secrecy in a galaxy rife with resistance and rebellion.



Figure IV.3: The starship Scorpio in "Assassin" (S4E7)

# FEDERATION SPACE



**SECTORS:** Federation space is divided into sectors. For convenience, we've added a reference system for zones (for example, 'Zone Gamma-3) although sectors were not given specific coordinates in the TV series.

**TRAVEL TIMES:** If you are using the roleplaying rules later in this book, you can make a general assumption that travel times within a quadrant is 1-6 days, and traveling across each full quadrant takes another 6 days.

**OTHER SYSTEMS:** The map above lists only the notable places that appeared in the TV series. The further away you get from the core worlds centered around earth, the more lawless or dystopian the world is likely to be. There are also many dozens of other systems not labelled that could be ripe for future adventures.

## WORLDS

Below are the worlds mentioned in the TV series including notes on which episodes featured that world. There are of course hundreds of other worlds that remained unexplored on the fringes of Federation space.

**Albion:** “Countdown” (S2E9). A planet where the Federation installs an intergalactic communication device, it becomes the focal point of a race against time to deactivate a deadly bomb.

**Aristo:** “Orac” (S1E13). Home to the creator of Orac, Ensor, and the resting place of the powerful supercomputer, Orac. The planet’s environment is hostile due to high radiation levels.

**Auron:** “Children of Auron” (S3E7). A planet inhabited by a race of telepaths, it is also Cally’s homeworld. The society is isolationist and promotes non-interference with other cultures.

**Betafarl:** “Warlord” (S4E12). A key planet in Avon’s strategy against the Federation. It is known for producing a substance critical to creating a defense against a Federation weapon.

**Bucol-2:** “Animals” (S4E5). A remote outpost where the Federation conducts genetic experiments on animals to make them more aggressive for use in warfare.

**Caspar:** “Stardrive” (S4E4). The home of the Space Rats, a group of speed-obsessed anarchists. The planet is where the Liberator crew seeks the powerful stardrive.

**Cephlon:** “The Web” (S1E5), “Deliverance” (S1E12). A remote and strange planet, home to both the Decimas, mutated beings, and their creators, who seek to exploit the Decimas.

**Centero:** “Seek-Locate-Destroy” (S1E6). A Federation-controlled planet where the crew raids a communications center in search of a powerful cryptography device.

**Chenga:** “Powerplay” (S3E2). A planet known for its salvage operations, where shipwrecked survivors are harvested for their organs by the native populace.

**Crandor:** “Dawn of the Gods” (S3E4). A mysterious planet at the center of a black hole, ruled over by a being claiming to be the ancient god Caliph.

**Cygnus Alpha:** “Cygnus Alpha” (S1E3). A prison planet where the Federation sends its criminals. It’s dominated by a religious fanatic named Vargas.

**Domo:** “Assassin” (S4E7). A desert-like planet known for its slave markets, where Avon and the crew go in search of a notorious assassin.

**Earth:** “The Way Back” (S1E1), “Pressure Point” (S2E5), “Rumours of Death” (S3E8). The birthplace of humanity and the central hub of the Federation. It’s heavily controlled, with citizens under constant surveillance.

**Exbar:** “Hostage” (S2E8). A remote and inhospitable planet where Travis lures Blake by taking Blake’s cousin as a hostage.

**Fosforon:** “Killer” (S2E7). Home to a Federation research station, it becomes ground zero for a deadly plague.

**Gauda Prime:** “Blake” (S4E13). A rain-soaked and grim planet with a history of rebellion against the Federation. It is where the series reaches its tragic climax.

**Goth:** “The Keeper” (S2E12). A medieval-style planet where the native population is controlled through fear. The crew seeks information on the location of Star One here.

**Helotrix:** “Traitor” (S4E3). A planet recently taken over by the Federation using a drug called Pylene-50 which suppresses resistance.

**Horizon:** “Horizon” (S2E4). A planet rich in a mineral needed by the Federation. Its native population is oppressed and enslaved for mining operations.

**Kairos:** “The Harvest of Kairos” (S3E5). A planet known for its valuable crystalline substance, where the crew confronts a strategist named Jarvik.

**Keezarn:** “City at the Edge of the World” (S3E6). A barren world holding the entrance to another dimension. Vila’s locksmith skills become essential here.

**Lindor:** “Bounty” (S1E11). A peaceful planet that becomes embroiled in a plot to restore a deposed president to power.

**Malodar:** “Orbit” (S4E11). An isolated and secret research base where Avon meets the scientist Egrorian and is tempted by a powerful weapon.

**Mecron II:** “Games” (S4E8). The planet holds a casino city where the crew seeks a crystal needed for a device against the Federation.

**Obsidian:** “Volcano” (S3E3). A neutral planet in the conflict between the rebels and the Federation. It’s destroyed to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands.

**Sardos:** “Moloch” (S3E11). Home to a Federation base where a computer called Moloch reveals future developments to its leaders.

**Sarran:** “Aftermath” (S3E1). A planet where Avon and Dayna crash-land after the destruction of Star One, encountering the warlike Sarrans.

**Sinofar’s planet:** “Duel” (S1E8). Controlled by the powerful Sinofar, it’s where Blake and Travis are forced to duel to the death.

**Space World:** “Redemption” (S2E1). The base of the System, a robotic civilization that built and controls the Liberator.

**Terminal:** “Terminal” (S3E13). A planet containing an elaborate illusion crafted by Servalan to capture the Liberator and its crew.

**Teal and Vador:** “Death-Watch” (S3E12). Two planets on the brink of war, resolving their conflict through a duel between champions.

**Ultraworld:** “Ultraworld” (S3E10). A living planet aiming to assimilate all knowledge, it tries to absorb the memories of the crew.

**Virn:** “Sand” (S4E9). A planet with living sand that has unique properties and has caused the death of many.

**Xenon:** “Rescue” (S4E1), “Power” (S4E2). The location of the base the crew uses after the loss of the Liberator. It’s also home to an ancient and deadly power struggle.

**Zerok:** “Gold” (S4E10). Known for its gold mines, it’s central to a plot by Avon to undermine the Federation’s economy.

**Zonda:** “Shadow” (S2E2). A planet where the crew encounters the mysterious drug called Shadow and the telepathic beings called Moon Discs.



Figure IV.4: Blake & Avon in "Trial" (S2E6)

# Gaming

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WAR GAMES AND ROLEPLAYING GAMES have been used with great success to model and understand everything from a theater-of-war, detecting vulnerabilities in a process, and (in this case) as a way of better understanding a setting. There have been several fan-based roleplaying games introduced over the decades. In our case, we'll use the Cinematic rules (by Stan Shinn, the author of this work) as a way to model the characters and starships in the Blake's 7 setting.

## RULES

The core rules of the game are simple and fast. GMs don't roll dice and can focus their efforts on the collaborative story that unfolds.

**Ability Rolls:** To do something risky, roll one or more dice, keeping only the die with the highest result.

- **If Untrained:** Roll 1d4 (the default rating for plausibly using an 'untrained' ability). Some tasks are impossible if not trained.
- **If Trained:** Roll the die rating for your ability (1d6, 1d8, 1d10, or d12).
- **If Hindered:** Downgrade and roll 1d4.
- **If Advantaged:** If circumstances grant a special advantage, add a d6 and take the highest single die as the result.
- **If Assisted:** Add a d6 and take the highest single die result (helping characters share in the outcome). You can't assist with an untrained skill.
- **If Using a Mount, Vehicle, or Ship:** The GM will give you guidance on modifiers. Add a scale die (d6 to d12) to your roll. If your opposition is larger in scale, use a modifier of -2 to -6 (results lower than 1 are just a 1).

**Results:** Roll to see if you get what you want. Usually, rolls of 1-4 result in a hindrance.

- **1-2: Misfortune.** Things go badly. If a high stakes roll, you gain a hindrance.
- **3-4: Success with a Drawback.** You get what you want but you gain a hindrance.
- **5+: Unqualified Success.** Higher is better. If you can't achieve your goal (such as shooting a target but finding it's bulletproof), you'll still gain valuable information or get an advantage.

**Advantages:** Roll a relevant ability to create advantages (a D6 helping die). Examples: Roll Sensors to find asteroids in which to take cover. Roll Leadership to inspire a single crew person. Advantages require GM approval, often only apply to one roll, and last until it no longer makes narrative sense.

**Fortune Points:** Start each adventure with 1. Spend a fortune point to either get a +2 on your roll, a reroll of all your dice (taking this result, even if lower), or to power a stunt. Earn fortune points by doing something amazing (the GM will decide when, but players are free to nominate others for a hero point) or when a trouble causes problems in the story. The GM may also allow you to spend 1-3 fortune points to edit the plot (the bigger the change, the higher the cost).

**Load:** Carry up to an amount that makes narrative sense. Carrying multiple bulky items (shields, two-handed swords, heavy guns, etc.) may hinder your actions.

**Defense:** Select gear as well as armor can break to turn a hit into a hindrance. Until repaired, broken equipment remains useless. Armor that breaks harmlessly automatically repairs one break with each subsequent scene.

**Hindrances:** If you roll 4 or less on a high-stakes roll, the GM may give you a hindrance such as afraid, angry, hopeless, bleeding, broken, or prone. In pulp settings, track your 1st hit as a benign hindrance but you aren't hindered until your 2nd hit,

and your 3rd hindrance will always be out of action. In heroic settings, your first 3 hits don't make you hindered, your 4th hit makes you hindered, and your 5th hit takes you out of action.

**Out of Action:** Out of action means you no longer participate in the scene and the GM decides your fate (unconscious, catatonic, kidnapped, etc.).

**Healing:** Hindrances (both physical and emotional) heal with time and/or medical attention. If killed, the GM should introduce your new character ASAP. With GM approval, you can also use abilities to recover ahead of schedule.

**Traits:** Tags are short descriptions that further define your character or your gear. Effects can be narrative or mechanical.

**Troubles:** Characters have 2 troubles. Troubles can be enemies, secrets, relationships or anything that causes complications. If you have superpowers or use magic, one of these troubles should be a weakness that will shut down your main power. The GM or players can invoke a trouble in the fiction to award a fortune point to the player at the expense of enduring the narrative effects of the trouble. A GM can also ask you to roll your trouble die to see if you can act against that trouble or overcome its effects.

## SUPPORTING CHARACTERS AND SIDEKICKS

Sometimes, your character might not be in a scene. In such cases, play a supporting character with no stat block (use a d6 if they need to roll). This approach also works for sidekicks such as pets or robot servants. If you make a supporting character your new primary character (e.g. after your old character dies or retires), grant them stats per the usual rules.

## VEHICLES, SHIPS, AND MOUNTS

In games where everyone typically has access to the same mounts, vehicles, or ships, just use the normal core rules. If different sizes of mounts, vehicles, and ships are a big part of your setting, add a die to your rolls equal to the size of your mount, vehicle, or ship. To account for the opposition, add a scale modifier to your roll. With even larger opposition (ancient dragons, moon-sized star kills, etc.), add an opposition modifier of -8 or -10, or the GM may simply say that trying to overcome something that big isn't possible through direct attack.

*Example: Pilots in a single-person starfighter rolling to navigate an asteroid belt add a d6 to their Piloting d10 roll for their starfighter. If attacking a star cruiser the pilot character would roll Piloting d10, adding d6 for their ship, and add a -4 modifier to account for the star cruiser opposition.*

**SCALE TABLE**

Scale Die	Opp. Mod.	Mount or Creature	Vehicle	Ship
d6	–	Horse	Motorcycle	Shuttle, Starfighter
d8	-2	Chariot, Warhorse	Car	Scout
d10	-4	Elephant	Tank	Cruiser
d12	-6	Dragon	Battlemech	Destroyer

If using scale, any result less than a 1 is counted as a 1.

When using a vehicle, mount, or ship, rolling a disaster or setback will effect either the character or their vehicle, mount, or ship depending on context. Like characters, vehicle, mount, and ships can receive conditions, are out of action on their third condition, and can be hindered. Vehicles, mounts, and ships can have armor or hide that breaks (sometimes multiple times) to avoid effects of disaster rolls.

# CHARACTERS

There are five steps to create characters: (1) Create a Character Concept, (2) Choose Abilities, (3) Define Troubles, (4) List Gear, and (5) Add Name, Description, and other narrative details.

## STEP 1: CONCEPT

Start with a character concept, a profession, species or class connected to one or more adjectives (examples: Fearful Cutpurse and Greedy Scientist).

## STEP 2: ABILITIES

The *Cinematic* RPG rules stand out for their unparalleled flexibility in character creation, allowing players to craft intricate, multi-dimensional personas that can fit into virtually any story universe or setting. Players use descriptive phrases, called “abilities,” that encapsulate their character’s strengths, backgrounds, and unique qualities.

To create a character, you start with a paragraph story description of your character which includes abilities and flaws. Think of it as a biographical outline, describing the most essential elements of your character. Think about the character’s background and current profession. Include keywords, personality traits, important possessions, relationships, and anything else that suggests what you can do and why. The paragraph should be about 100 words long.

Compose the description in complete, grammatical sentences. No lists of abilities; no sentence fragments.

Once your narrative is finished, convert the description into a set of abilities and flaws. Mark any keywords with double underlines. Mark any other word or phrase that could be an ability or flaw with a single underline. Then write these keywords, abilities or flaws on your character sheet. Remember that some abilities and flaws may be a breakout from a keyword.

There is no limit to the number of abilities you can gain from a single sentence, as long as the sentence is not just a list of abilities. If your GM decides a sentence is just a list, they may allow the first two abilities, or they may tell the player to rewrite the sentence.

Finally, assign your top five abilities a die rating: one rated at d10 and four at d8. Anything else you could potentially do, such as a skill, is not recorded and are rated a d6.

Keep your paragraph description handy for future use. Any keywords or abilities that don’t currently have a die rating could be added as new d8 skills as your character advances with experience.

Here is an example 100 word character story for Roj Blake.

Roj Blake, once a revered resistance leader, had his memories suppressed by the totalitarian Federation and was framed for crimes he didn’t commit. Possessing an unwavering sense of justice and a burning desire to overthrow the oppressive regime, he’s driven by visions of a free and just galaxy. He’s charismatic, drawing people to his cause, but his black and white view of morality sometimes creates tension among his crew. His past as a revolutionary equipped him with guerrilla warfare tactics and an analytical mind, but his faith in humanity can be both a strength and a vulnerability. When he discovered the advanced alien starship, Liberator, he became its



Figure V.1: Blake & Avon on the Liberator flight deck in "Cygnus Alpha" (S1E3)

starship captain and uses the ship with its teleport bracelets and high-tech handguns as tools against the Federation.

**Select Two Keywords:** Starting with words which you've double-underlined, select two abilities to make into keywords. Characters in this setting typically have a background keyword and a profession keyword. These keywords aren't rated but serve as a category for abilities.

#### **DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR ABILITIES**

To ensure you have well-rounded abilities, ask yourself which ability you would use to solve these questions. If you have some gaps, you might consider updating your abilities or noting future abilities you wish to create once you have enough XP.

**Questions When Creating Abilities:** In order to ensure you have well-rounded abilities, ask yourself which ability you would use to solve these questions. If you have some gaps, you might consider updating your abilities.

- **Hand-to-Hand.** How do I fight in melee?
- **Ranged Combat.** Can I attack at range? What does that look like?
- **Defense.** How do I defend myself if physically attacked?
- **Might.** How would I perform acts of strength or endure physical challenges? How would I attack if unarmed?
- **Agility.** How would I throw something? How would I run and evade obstacles?
- **Mental.** How would I decipher puzzles? How do I know things about the world?

- **Social.** How would I persuade someone? How would I trick or deceive someone?



Figure V.2: Derelict ship in "Killer" (S2E7)

### **STEP 3: TROUBLES**

Choose two Troubles, one rated a d10 and one rated a d8. Troubles can be secrets, enemies, character flaws or anything that causes you trouble in the story. If it is a game with superpowers, the first Trouble should be a superpower limit: some way an enemy can shut down your powers if they were to know your weakness.

### **STEP 4: GEAR**

List any key gear that would be reasonable for your character to have with them most of the time.

### **STEP 4: FINISHING TOUCHES**

Add Name, Description, and other narrative details.

### **CHARACTER EXAMPLE**

In our example of creating Roj Blake's character, after reviewing the character's bio, we arrive at this final stat block.



**ROJ BLAKE**

**Abilities**

Resistance Leader  
— Charismatic d10  
— Analytical Mind d8  
— Handgun Use d8

Starship Captain  
— Advanced Alien Starship d8  
— Starship Operation d8

**Flaws**

Framed for Crimes d10  
Memories Suppressed d8

**Gear**

Teleport Bracelet  
Liberator Handgun

## ADVANCEMENT

After adventures or missions, increase a skill (none (d6) → d8 → d10 → d12).

## CREATING ADVENTURES

Use one of the below techniques to create low-prep adventures.

### LEVERAGE TROUBLES

Record each PC's troubles. Introduce story complications related to the trouble or offer adventures that would let a character overcome a trouble once and for all.

### PLAYER PROMPTS

For game ideas, give the players writing prompts such as:

- A diabolical enemy
- A dangerous obstacle
- A devious motive
- An imperilled victim
- A mysterious object
- An exotic location
- A love interest
- A villainous faction

Have each player use notecards, a whiteboard, butcher paper, or a battlemat to record and share their ideas, putting the player's initials next to each of their ideas.

When done, take a short break and do a quick ten minute brainstorm on how to kick off the adventure using the player ideas as a basis. Then, run the adventure, incorporating as many of the player ideas as you can. Don't worry if you don't have the ending or details all figured out — things will evolve and emerge as you play!

## **CHARACTER BACKSTORY HOOKS**

To develop your character's backstory, have players create a Friend, Family, and Foe NPC and a Flame (a need or desire) backstory hooks for their character. A Friend is an NPC who can be anything from a drinking buddy to a contact in the local royal court. These NPCs can be patrons, plot hooks, or just for fun roleplaying. A Family member is an NPC related to the PC. A Foe is an NPC that is directly opposing the PC either directly or indirectly. A Flame is something the PC desires and can be an NPC they are in love with, a need to seek justice against an evil empire, or an object (perhaps a magic relic or powerful weapon) that the PC desires.

Combining a couple of these four hooks is a great way to start an adventure with little prep. Pick a character's Foe and have them take some diabolical action that will engage the PCs. Perhaps threaten a Friend or Family member. Consider tossing out an opportunity to pursue a Flame.

## **TRIGGERED HEISTS**

One really easy to run format is a Triggered Mission. These games follow this format:

**1. Opening Mission.** Initial scene where the PCs are assigned a mission. It could be to fight an evil villain in his lair, rescue someone, or pull off a heist. The key concept is there is a location that the PCs have to investigate and scope out before the final act.

**2. Prep.** The following scenes are investigation, strategy, and preparing to accomplish the goal. The PCs drive the action; the GM simply answers questions.

**3. Boss Scene Trigger.** At a certain point (usually 1/3 or 2/3 through the game), regardless of what the PCs are doing, something 'triggers' the final climactic scene. The trigger is important because it makes sure you have time for the final infiltration and boss fight.

**4. Boss Fight.** This is the final set piece battle.

### **EXAMPLES OF TRIGGERS:**

- You receive a secret message from an informant tell you something is happening at a certain location and time (which is only minutes from now).
- You are rescuing a kidnap victim held in an impregnable fortress. You discover they will be relocated and there is an optimal time and location to free the victim. At the trigger point, you receive word the victim is being moved.
- You are exploring a dungeon. At the trigger point, the next door you open is the lair of the boss monster. (You may want to redraw the map on the fly so that the final room or cavern is now at that point in the dungeon crawl).
- You are exploring a derelict large sailing ship. After the fourth room you investigate (regardless of where in the ship you are), the fifth scene kicks in, which is a boss fight with an enemy.

## **INSPIRATIONAL INTERLUDE**

Ask for one or more volunteers who is willing to narrate a bit of background story for their character.

Have the player roll a d4 (or perhaps just pick one that interests them) and then spend a few minutes thinking up and then narrating the backstory type they've

rolled. Let them know that something is happening in the present which will connect the current players with this past event.

### **1D4 BACKSTORY RESULTS:**

Roll a d4.

**1) Lost Love.** What person (or thing) has the character lost in the past? What stands in the way of fulfilling that love? What event happens in the present that gives the player an opportunity (with the party's help) to seek that lost love?

**2) Old Enemy.** What past foe became the character's enemy? What terrible consequences came from this old rivalry? What event resurfaces your connection to this enemy?

**3) Secret Need.** What undisclosed need does your character have? Why have you kept this a secret? Who or what is in the way of getting your need? What has just happened that gives you hope you might finally fulfil your need?

**4) Terrible Tragedy.** What terrible tragedy befell the character or someone the character knows? What collateral damage resulted? What person or creature from the past now emerges that demands you address this past injustice

After the player has finished their inspirational interlude, kick off the game using their story as a hook. This is usually enough to generate satisfying story momentum. Because the player has created the adventure hook, they are invested in what comes next!

## **AD LIB ADVENTURES**

Ad Lib adventures follow a fill-in-the-blank approach. Start the game without planning. Read the setup to the players. Ask questions and use the answers to collaboratively build the adventure. Usually it is best if you just ask one question at a time. Once there is a satisfying answer to that question, then move on to the next question. Make it a group discussion: everyone collaborates on the story. Finally, ask "What do you do?" Then, play to see what happens, using players' ideas and your own imagination!

This format is great for con games or to kick off a campaign. Here are a couple of examples. Feel free to come up with your own!

### **AD LIB ADVENTURE: SLAYER TO LAIR**

An example adventure beginning in a small village.

**Setup:** "You're visiting a small village. The streets are mostly deserted and villagers eye you with suspicion. There seems to be a disturbing air of fear."

#### **Questions:**

- "What is the legendary creature most feared in this region?"
- "What cult is sacrificing young virgins to appease the monstrosity?"
- "What else motivates you to slay it?"
- "Where is its lair?"
- "What prevents you from getting there?"
- "Who else is involved and trying to stop you?"
- "What is the the creature rumored to protect or hoard?"

### **AD LIB ADVENTURE: HEROES UNDER FIRE**

An example adventure starting in a vehicle on fire.

**Setup:** "You're in an overturned vehicle that is on fire. Someone is shooting at you. It's very important that you protect the vehicle's content."

#### **Questions:**

- "What's inside the vehicle?"
- "Why are your attackers shooting at you?"
- "Who are the allies of these attackers?"
- "What riddle must you still solve?"

- “What hazards await you if you approach your enemy’s stronghold?”
- “Who else is interested in stopping you?”