



**STAR TREK<sup>®</sup>**  
**ROLEPLAYING GAME**

**MIRROR UNIVERSE:**  
THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

CREDITS

DECIPHER INC. PRESENTS A JESS HEINIG PRODUCTION

# MIRROR UNIVERSE

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

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MIRROR UNIVERSE

THE TWISTED  
REFLECTION



# THE VISION IN THE MIRROR

*The first and most important thing for players and Narrators to realize about the Mirror Universe is that it is not the Federation Universe we all know and love. The Mirror Universe gleams with unfettered ambition, where the darkest elements of Human (and alien) nature rule the day.*

*By dramatic fiat, the Mirror Universe encourages villainy and rewards ambition. The ideals of community, justice and friendship often fail here. Players and Narrators alike must realize that the Mirror Universe is not only a squalid place, but a largely irredeemable one. Story dictates to nature here: Regardless of the best intentions of the players, the Mirror Universe will always be moody, treacherous and ultimately destructive in the end.*

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## AXIOMS OF THE MIRROR UNIVERSE

Dramatically, the four axioms included here work as linchpins to the Mirror Universe. Narrators running a Federation Universe Crew through an episode or two in the Mirror Universe should stress the differences in axioms between the two settings. Both sides must remember that the Mirror Universe's very nature conspires to make these dangerous and often terrible things true, often at the expense of the players' characters. Characters used to the Federation Universe may not have the innately treacherous nature necessary to Mirror Universe survival, while natives of the dark reflection are enemies to one another just as dangerous as any outside adversary.

## CINEMATIC ACTION

The Mirror Universe is a place of cinematic action, where the rule is "do unto others *before* they do unto you." The Mirror Universe is even more action-packed than the Federation Universe because in addition to outside threats, there is always the concern of danger from within the Crew, from one's own subordinates or allies. Everyone in the Mirror Universe is a potential enemy, and should be treated accordingly.

Also, the inhabitants of the Mirror Universe don't concern themselves with concepts like the Federation Prime Directive. The Prime Directive of the Imperial Starfleet is "maintain terror," and "negotiation" proceeds at knife (or phaser) point. Landing parties don't meet peacefully with new species; they deliver an ultimatum, then kill anyone who fails to cooperate. Alliances, personal or otherwise, are a matter of convenience, to be discarded at the first opportunity. Treachery is everywhere.

Like the Federation Universe, technology in the Mirror Universe exists to support the needs of a good, dramatic story. Weapons are spectacular and used often. Everyone goes armed, ready for trouble at any moment. Devices like agonizers and agony booths exist to punish failure. The technology of the underdogs is always inferior, clunky, and prone to breaking down. The technology controlled by the aggressors is superior, advanced, and coldly efficient. The most powerful people control secret super-technologies like the Tantalus Field (see page 16). In all cases, technology is simply a tool to express the axioms of the setting.

## HUMAN ACTION AND FREE WILL

In the Mirror Universe, individuals can and do make a difference. Indeed, they're the only thing that ever does make a difference. The ability to impose one's will on others is the goal of nearly everyone in the Mirror Universe. Individual actions are important in the overall scheme of things.

Vast, impersonal forces exist in the background of the setting. Nations like the Empire and the Alliance oppress vast populations, and carry out massive wars of conquest. But the real action of the setting happens on the personal level. Episodes focus not on the power of the Empire, but the ambition of a single starship captain and his quest for power and glory; not on the politics of the Alliance, but the actions of the Intendant of Terok Nor and how she deals with the Humans under her "tender care." Likewise, the actions that decide the fate of millions spring from individuals. Garth of Izar rose to power through his own efforts. Spock single-handedly changed the course of the Empire and brought about its destruction.

Of course, the key difference between the Mirror Universe and the Federation Universe is that things like the greater good seldom motivate people in the Mirror Universe. They direct their free will toward goals like gaining personal power and the destruction of their enemies. A would-be Emperor might believe that his rise to power is "for the greater good," but he's certainly not going to make sacrifices to benefit anyone other than himself.

## INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCE

In addition to having the ability to chart their own destinies, individuals in the Mirror Universe are highly competent. This is even truer than it is in the Federation Universe, since the Mirror Universe has a harsh way of weeding out the incompetent: they end up dead. Occasionally enslaved, but mostly dead. Incompetents never make it far enough to actually gain any real power.

Of course the competence displayed by individuals in the Mirror Universe differs from that found in the Federation Universe. Federation Starfleet officers and other individuals devote themselves to personal betterment for its own sake. They pursue art, music, and intellectual hobbies like archeology alongside athletics and career training. Personal development in the Mirror Universe is focused entirely on the acquisition and use of power. Imperial Starfleet officers are only interested in art and archeology as an ability to appraise stolen art treasures and help locate alien ruins that might contain useful technology. Literature and philosophy aren't studied for their own sake, but for the ability to impress others, and perhaps to learn enough about Human nature to help manipulate people. Machiavelli's *The Prince*, or Shakespeare's *Comical History of Richard III* embody the Mirror Universe's idea of "great literature."

Individual competence is also important to Mirror Universe denizens because the only person you can ever really trust in the Mirror Universe is yourself. No matter how extensive a network of agents and underlings a person may have, no matter how many allies, if the individual is incapable of taking care of himself, he inevitably ends up dead at the hands of one of his "trusted friends."



## TRIUMPH OF EVIL

This is the key axiom of the Mirror Universe. There is nothing and no one that can stand against the application of sufficient skill, determination, and treachery. Sooner or later, ambition and self-aggrandizement always triumph in the Mirror Universe. Individuals fall to betrayal or plots by their underlings. Rebels are sought out and crushed by the power of the Empire—or the rebels themselves become a new regime of terror. The softhearted yield to the might of the strong willed. The Terran Empire grew and prospered following this axiom. When the Empire abandoned its course of conquest, it was crushed by the Alliance, which took its place. Attempts at reform and rebellion have created temporary change, but nothing has altered the basic view that power is the ultimate goal in life, and that the strong must rule the weak.

One important factor affecting this axiom is its occasional contact with the Federation Universe. In that case, the power of the Human spirit, acting in accordance with the greater good, always triumphs over evil. That is why nearly all the “good” that has happened in the Mirror Universe has been a direct result of the intervention of people from the Federation Universe. Mirror Universe people are simply incapable of acting selflessly for the greater good. It may be that the influence of Federation Universe individuals like James Kirk and Julian Bashir may lead to true change in the nature of the Mirror Universe eventually, but it hasn't happened yet.

## THEMES OF THE MIRROR UNIVERSE

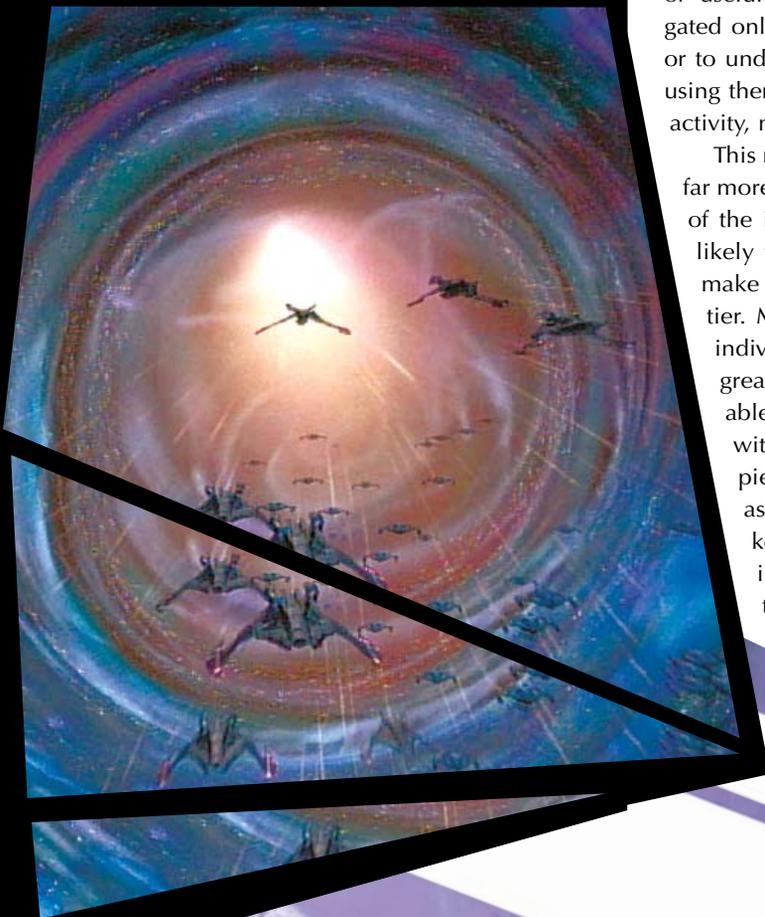
The axioms are the basic laws that govern stories in the Mirror Universe. Each story showcases these axioms in some way, both to provide dramatic effect and to highlight the differences between the Mirror and Federation Universes. Themes provide the “why?” of the story, while the axioms describe *how* things happen in the Mirror Universe. The theme thus provides the driving motivation of the story itself.

Not every story has to have a theme, of course. Episodes in the Mirror Universe can consist of the Crew killing their enemies, gathering booty, and plotting the demise of their associates, but themes serve to enhance the story and give it deeper meaning. Themes also help hold a series together and make it more than just one “phaser ‘em dead” story after another.

## EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST

The missions of vessels belonging to the Imperial Starfleet, or the Alliance fleet, are as much about personal gain as they are about seeking out new worlds. The Empire and the Alliance explore solely to find new worlds to conquer. They make contact with new species and civilizations to take control of them, and loot whatever valuable resources they might have. Planets are only of interest based on their value as targets. Archeological ruins are explored only to find valuable or useful artifacts. Unusual phenomena are investigated only to discover how to use them as weapons, or to understand them enough to prevent rebels from using them against you. Exploration is a purely selfish activity, not a quest for knowledge for its own sake.

This not only serves the expansion of the state, but far more importantly, it increases the personal power of the individuals involved. A skilled conqueror is likely to parlay his or her skills into the ability to make conquests at home as well as on the frontier. Mirror Universe history records a number of individuals whose personal power became so great as a result of their conquests that they were able to seize positions of power for themselves with ease. Discovery of a unique resource or piece of information can be the key to personal ascension. Of course, it can also become the key to personal destruction, if the secret falls into the wrong hands, or if allies are willing to betray you in order to seize your discovery for themselves.



Not all exploration and conquest stories have to be about new worlds or alien cultures. The Crew can also explore the labyrinthine corridors of power, dig up carefully hidden conspiracies (against the crew or others), discover and entice new allies, and conquer enemies at home just as well as they can explore in the depths of space. It is often possible to combine the two types of exploration together into a single story.

## SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT

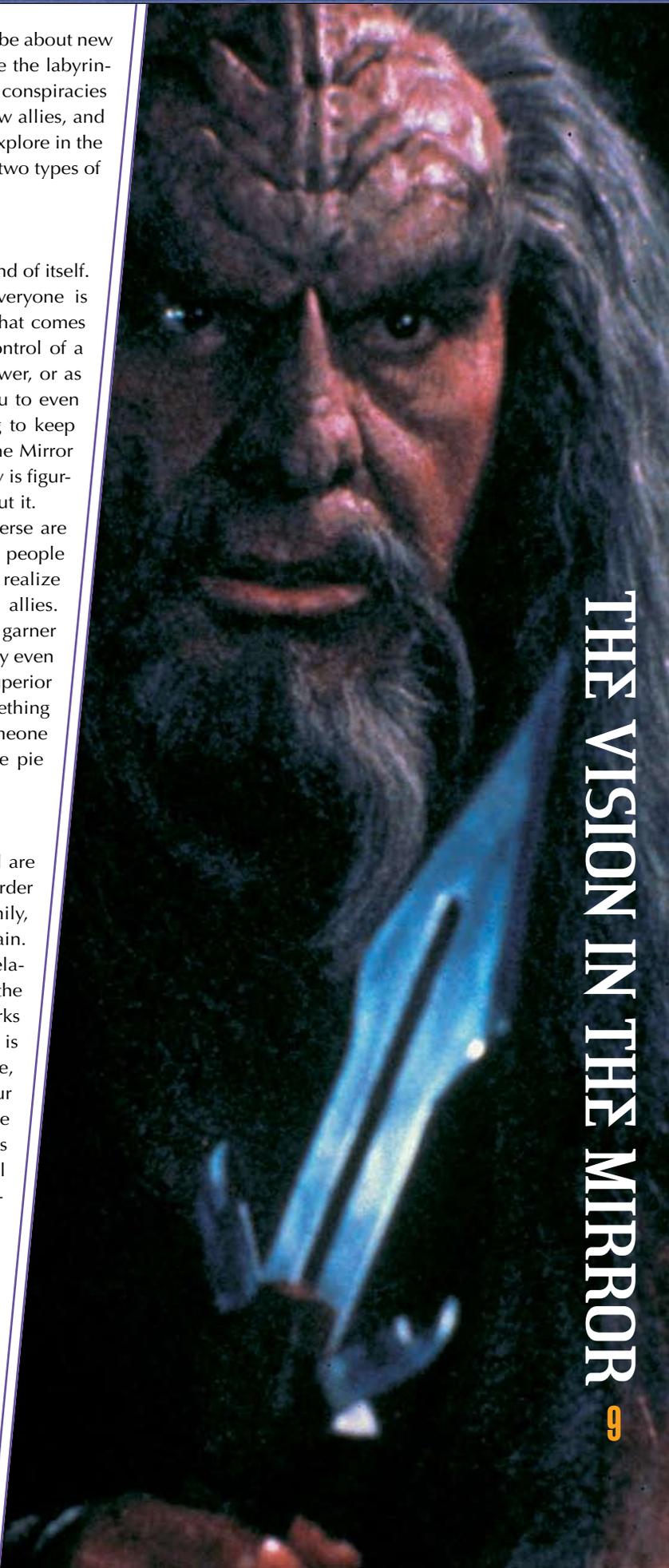
The desire for personal gain is also a theme in and of itself. Selfishness pervades the Mirror Universe, and everyone is motivated by a desire for personal power and all that comes with it. This theme can be as simple as seizing control of a new world or resource to add to your personal power, or as complex as an apparent sacrifice that can lead you to even greater gains in the long run. The important thing to keep in mind is the “angle.” Nobody does anything in the Mirror Universe unless it benefits him in some way. The key is figuring out how, before it’s too late to do anything about it.

Although all the inhabitants of the Mirror Universe are ultimately out for themselves, that doesn’t mean people can’t work together. For one thing, the smart ones realize there’s strength in numbers and it’s good to have allies. Also, the weak tend to follow the strong, hoping to garner a few crumbs of power. Patient and careful allies may even be able to gather enough power to topple their superior and take his place. As long as everyone gets something out of the deal, things work smoothly. It’s when someone inevitably decides they want a bigger piece of the pie that it starts getting tricky.

## DILEMMAS OF POWER

People in the Mirror Universe seek power, and are usually willing to do whatever they have to in order to get ahead. This includes betraying friends, family, or other allegiances in the name of personal gain. Ironically, one needs to cultivate such personal relationships in order to gain power, so people in the Mirror Universe are constantly building up networks of allies, knowing that everyone in these networks is a potential traitor. The more powerful you become, the more complex, and potentially treacherous, your network of agents and allies becomes. Those who are in the strongest positions of power are also the ones who present the most tempting targets, so powerful characters have to spend considerable time safeguarding their position.

Episodes involving dilemmas of power primarily focus on roleplaying and dialogue between characters. Such leaders seek to maintain their useful relationships and protect their own positions while others scheme against them and look toward personal advancement, usually at the expense of those superiors. The Narrator can use this theme to foster a certain amount of group unity, by presenting an outside enemy and forcing the Crew to band together for mutual protection (See



## MIRROR UNIVERSE THEMES

Here are some story ideas that demonstrate some of the common Mirror Universe themes, and how they differ from their Federation Universe counterparts:

### EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST

- The Crew visits a new, unexplored, planet and must determine if it is worth conquering and how best to go about it.
- The Crew encounters a new life-form. Is it a possible threat to be destroyed or a possible asset they can use?
- A member of the Crew discovers a plot against him or her. Who is behind it, and why? More importantly, is it an erstwhile ally, and how will it affect the individual's network of "trusted allies"?
- The Crew hears about the promise of powerful alien technology in a lost ruin. Do they pursue it (and if not, why?), and who seizes control of it?

### SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT

- A Crewmember is "offered" a dangerous mission. It has the potential for personal gain if successful, but disaster—blame, maiming or the exposure of personal weaknesses or conspiracies—if something goes wrong.
- A breakdown in ship or station systems endangers the Crew. Was it sabotage? How can the Crew come together to fix the problem when they don't know who caused it and who they can trust?
- A Crewmember is threatened by an alien virus or infection. Is it an accident or an assassination attempt? Does the Crewmember trust the medical officer or look for a cure on his own?
- The Crew spies or enters into a false alliance with a potential enemy in order to learn more about his plans and resources before moving against him.
- A Crewmember plots the assassination of a superior officer to advance in rank.

### DILEMMAS OF POWER

- The Crew is offered the opportunity to assist a senior officer in a plot to overthrow his superior. Is it a genuine offer or some sort of trick? How will the Crew insulate themselves from blame if the attempt fails?
- A Crewmember gains access to a "treasure map" that leads to some valuable resource. Trouble is, he can't find it alone. Who does he trust enough to ask for help and how much does he tell them?
- The Crew is dealing with a new and hostile species. Does the Crew seek to destroy them or try to cultivate them as useful (if dangerous) allies?
- A superior officer is behaving strangely. Does the Crew turn against him, or is his odd behavior some sort of test or trick to expose disloyalty among the Crew?

### FREE WILL

- The Crew is captured by enemies and must cooperate in order to escape. In the fashion of the Prisoner's Dilemma, each individual Crewmember has the chance to make a lucrative escape if he manages to betray the rest while they support him—but if more than one plots treachery, they are all doomed to failure.
- A Crewmember is given the authority to decide an important matter that may affect the Empire, such as wiping out a new race or choosing to conquer them.
- An omnipotent being toys with the Crew, enforcing its will on them, until they surrender. It loses interest when they choose not to "play."

### MIGHT MAKES RIGHT

- The Crew is assigned to destroy a city or colony as an example to a world that has defied the Empire.
- A new world must be conquered and brought under control.
- A seemingly weak or undeveloped civilization secretly holds the key to a great source of power (whether or not they know it).
- A Crewmember uses a newly acquired resource (from blackmail to alien technology) to advance in rank. How does the rest of the Crew react?

Sodalities, p. 35). On the other hand, Narrators can also use this theme to foster more conflict within the Crew, as they plot and scheme against each other. (For advice on juggling this, see Chapter Fifteen, *The Mirror Toolkit*.)

## FREE WILL

In many ways, the Mirror Universe is a place of ultimate free will, where you are only limited by your personal power when it comes to getting your own way and imposing your will on others. Of course, everyone is trying to achieve “free will” at the same time you are, and the dynamics of power say that only a few are going to climb high enough to have complete free will, while the majority are bound to the will of those few who rule. The key is to become one of the few rather than the majority. Stories involving this theme are about the struggle to gather the power you need to carry out your will, instead of carrying out somebody else’s.

Free will is also about decision-making, and the individual decisions of people affect the course of history in the Mirror Universe. Your choices decide whether you succeed or fail, and certain choices can affect things for everyone. The more power you have, the more your choices matter, because they have the potential to affect everyone. If a low-ranking Imperial Officer makes a poor choice and dies, then he’s the one who feels the most direct consequences of that bad choice. If the Emperor makes a poor choice, then the entire Empire suffers. Characters in the Mirror Universe value their free will even more than their Federation counterparts—it’s all that they can depend on.

## MIGHT MAKES RIGHT

In the Mirror Universe, free will and “legitimacy” rest in the hands of those with the power to claim them. The Emperor is always right because he says so, and because he has the power to back up what he says. Mirror Universe denizens see no hypocrisy in this. In fact, they’re very open and honest about it. To their point of view, it is more hypocritical to claim that the opinions of the powerless masses matter in the slightest.

Power rightfully belongs to whoever can seize it and continue to wield it. If you are foolish enough to let down your guard, even for an instant, then you deserve exactly what’s coming to you. Of course, if you are foolish enough to attack someone with agents capable of avenging his death, then you also deserve what’s coming to you. A person who advances through ruthless, careful planning and action is to be admired and feared, and ultimately plotted against.

