Table of Contents

Star★Guard 2640 by Bob Greenwade

In *Digital Hero* #5, Darren Watts explored the Star*Guard, an interstellar organization dedicated to fighting evil everywhere, focusing on the late 20th and early 21st Centuries. The organization was briefly revisited in *Galactic Champions* (page 66), showing how a portion of it will look in the 31st Century.

In both time periods, the power of the Star Staff, the Star*Guard's main personal weapon, depends mainly on the magical energies that allow superpowers to exist. Likewise, their mental and physical disciplines rely largely on those same energies. Those energies are at an extraordinarily low flow from the years 2020 to 3000, but the organization lives on.

Though focused on the year 2640 (the pivotal year in the *Terran Empire* era), most of the Star*Guard information here is valid for nearly any time period of the third millennium, including the periods described in *Alien Wars* and *Galactic Federation*.

The Star★Guard

From *Galactic Champions*:

Approximately one million years ago, on the planet Odrugar deep in what is now Se'ecra territory, an extraordinary being named Gloran was born. Gloran had one of the most powerful minds the Galaxy had ever known, and from a young age he became aware of the insidious nature of evil and the responsibility the strong had to protect the weak. He built a massive computer he called CONTROL, more advanced than any that had ever existed, and with its assistance began to seek out and battle those who would endanger the innocent and cause suffering to other intelligent life forms.

Gloran fought his war on evil for untold centuries, gathering to his side many allies, until at last his body began to fail him. Refusing to give up his crusade, he had his own brain engrams uploaded directly into the circuits of CONTROL. That way he could continue to assist and advise his followers, who by this time had become an army of hundreds known across space as the Star*Guard.

The guard adopted as its uniform the battlesuit Gloran wore, and with the aid of CONTROL developed a magnificent weapon known as the Star-Staff, which was feared by evildoers across the Galaxy. The earliest members of the Guard formed a Council of Overseers to manage the group which by the mid-twentieth century (as Earth accounts Time) had thousands of members patrolling the spaceways. The Council began to assign Star*Guards to specific sectors of space, with support teams (called "Marshals"), and bases full of equipment and ships to carry out their missions. Earth's sector received its first Star*Guard, a Dendrian named Brin Rei Tarn, in 1968, and he served there until his death in 1990 at the hands of a traitorous former Guardsman named Mordace.

The first (and to this point only) Human Star*Guard – a Spaniard named Andre Almena – replaced Tarn. Almena was still active in 2009 when Mordace led a small army of the Guard's enemies in a direct assault on Odrugar. That attack decimated the Guard and the Council, and damaged the physical quantum matrix containing CONTROL's memory circuits.

Almena and the other survivors did their best to rebuild the organization, but the Star*Guard had barely regained its footing when the defeat of Tyrannon changed the fundamental nature of the Universe in 2020. The Guardsmen found that many of their devices, including many functions of the Star-Staffs, no longer worked. (The Guard had long been aware that a "primal force" underlay Reality and made certain powers possible, but kept this information a closely-guarded secret, unknown even to most Guardsmen, for various reasons.)

With their weapons weakened and CONTROL no more than a powerful computer, the Guard adopted new tactics of secrecy and subtlety. Teaching its members the subtle skills of infiltration and disguise, the Guard transformed itself over the next few decades into a secret underground society, eschewing frontal assaults and well-armed bases for quiet stealth ships, networks of contacts, and missions of subversion from within. They continued to recruit new agents, and were sometimes nearly as effective as before, even if almost no one knew of their existence. The public image of the organization faded into legend and mythology.

As of 2640, the Star*Guard organization is a small but efficient secret society with about a thousand Guards and three Overseers, still based on Odrugar. One of the Overseers, an Az'arc'a using the name 2-N Violet, joined the Council during the Xenovore War period, and claims to be many thousands of years old and able to see the future. Violet maintains that, despite the steady decline in the Guard's membership and influence over the past several centuries, it's very important to the future of the Galaxy that the Guard remain an active force.

As for Odrugar itself, when the Se'ecra started to inch closer to that world the Overseers transformed the society into a pastoral world of simple farmers at the transition between ATRI 3

artwork by Darren Bulmer

But, I Thought They Were Good Guys…?

by John R. Ivicek Jr.

SO WHAT DO THEY WANT?

Figuring out what your villains hope to gain from this turn as good guys is the first question you should really answer. It might be access to classified files, locations, or equipment. Maybe it's simply money (if they're the ones guarding the armored car, it's a lot easier to steal, after all). Maybe it's revenge; now that they are the good guys, perhaps they frame the heroes and then publicly lament about how sad it is when heroes fall and how they'll do their duty to bring in these former icons… with a heavy heart, of course.

The goals should be specific to the team in question. In our example team, the Tech Knights, one possible goal is to gain access to military level research and information through the links they hope to gain as "Official Good Guys." This serves the overall purpose of keeping their boss, the Warlord, ahead of the game and on target for his ultimate goal of world domination.

One of the classic great comic book plots is the idea of the disguised villain. Since the Golden Age of comics, it's been a part of the genre to engage in misdirection. We can divide them into two main types for simplicity's sake:

1) The villains masquerade as their enemy. In this, the villains either have powers similar to the heroes, or they can fake it. They get dressed up like the heroes and go around committing crimes and saying things like "Hey Kid! Make sure you tell the cops that Defender stole your milk money!" Then it is up to the heroes to convince local law enforcement (and possibly other superhero teams as well) that they are, in fact, innocent so that they can track down the evil-doers and expose their nefarious plot. This was a mainstay of the Golden Age and you can still see it today in comic book arcs like the recent Crime Syndicate of America story in *Justice League of America*. It does, however, require that your villains are almost mirror images of the heroes, or maybe their evil duplicates from another dimension.

2) The villains masquerade as heroes. Not as any existing ones, but as a new group out to save the world. This one is more subtle and requires a lot of setup work on the GM's part. However, it has the potential for a lot more depth in terms of campaign complexity. Marvel Comics more or less defined this idea with their comic book *Thunderbolts*.

The first step in using this kind of plot is to figure out which villains you want to use (ideally preexisting, with some history with the PCs), and what they hope to achieve from this ploy (see the sidebar for more). Next, start figuring out what changes (if any) you need to make to the powers of the villains so that they can function as "good guys." Team selection is very important on several levels at this point. Not only do their powers factor into their ease of conversion, but so do their personalities, psychology, and goals. For example, the Crowns of Krim would scoff at the very idea of playing dress-up, and the aura of Dark Seraph alone makes it an unworkable concept. It's difficult to convince the world you're a good guy when you have a tangible aura of evil after all. The Ultimates can be a problem because Blackstar has grey skin and Radium is encased in a sealed suit. It's not unworkable, but you have to come up with genre-consistent ways to make any changes work.

The goal is misdirection. Yes, ultimately the PCs should figure out that the new super-team on the block is actually their old nemeses just in time to save the world, but if they figure it out too early, it's not really any fun for anyone. Conversely, if you make it too difficult (they had their minds swapped into completely different bodies with new brain patterns and powers and no way to tell at all…), well that's no fun either.

This is the sort of plot that should be introduced gradually and over time. Have the heroes meet the villains and (hopefully) defeat them early on in their careers. Perhaps they become a semi-recurring group that manages to get away more often than they get caught. Whatever relationship they have with the PCs, it should not be a case of, "Who are they again?" when the unmasking occurs. By the time you are ready to introduce the new "heroes," make sure that the PCs still remember the villains, but they haven't seen them for a while. They should be pretty far off the PCs' radar, but still memorable, when they appear in their new personas. Setting this up is the work of multiple game sessions and should not be rushed.

For our example, we're going to use the War Machine from *Conquerors, Killers and Crooks* pages 39-48. We have a five-member team of bad guys, all built on 350 points. We're going to give them all anywhere from 1-5 extra points, but they won't be in powers, it'll be in things like Acting and applicable Knowledge Skills needed to pull off the deception. Just to make sure the heroes don't latch on to the number of new "heroes," we're also going to take one Shadow Army Soldier and give him some gear to make the new team a little bigger. Try to keep the original mentality of a given villain firmly in mind when making any changes.

artwork by D.T. Butchino