



Spelljamming for Dummies

Everything you know about space is wrong.

Introduction

Space, the final frontier... Whoa, wait a minute! Space? I thought we were playing *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*? We are! In space.

In 1989, TSR introduced the boxed set *Spelljammer: AD&D Adventures in Space*. Surprisingly, it is not science fiction. You will find ships flying planet-to-planet but not high-tech propulsion systems, life support, computers, and other “standard” trappings of space travel. The setting has more in common with the stories of Jules Verne (*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*) and Edgar Rice Burroughs (*A Princess of Mars*).



Forget everything you “know” about space and physics and ponder what if...

- ❖ ... objects leaving an atmosphere retain a “bubble” of breathable air?
- ❖ ... a magical throne could convert spell energy into propulsion (i.e. spelljamming) and could be mounted to any kind of vessel, including ocean ships?
- ❖ ... localized gravity allows catapults to fire from ship-to-ship, in space?
- ❖ ... a large number of planets have breathable atmosphere allowing exploration or conquest?
- ❖ ... entire nations of spacefaring races sail among the stars engaging in trade and war?
- ❖ ... each solar system is encased in a black Crystal Sphere floating in an “ocean” filled with spheres?

Welcome to the worlds of *Spelljammer*! You will find exotic ships, an Imperial elven fleet keeping order, space dragons, merciless pirates attacking from the cover of asteroid belts, ravenous mind flayers bent on enslaving entire worlds, xenophobic beholders embroiled in a brutal civil war, planets rife with danger and treasure, and most of all, the freedom to sail anywhere and everywhere, adventuring wherever your helmsman steers you.

What is Spelljammer?

1. *Spelljammer* is a campaign setting mixing fantasy and space opera genres.
2. In the game itself, *Spelljammer* is a massive city-sized ship built in the shape of a manta ray, as seen in the *Spelljammer* logo. It is a unique vessel and subject of many mysteries, rumors, and speculation.



3. “Spelljamming,” refers to generating the propulsive force moving vessels through space. A spellcaster sits on a *spelljammer helm* (often appearing as a seat or throne). The individual’s spells are siphoned off establishing a link between person and vessel. The used spells provide the energy to propel ships at tremendous speeds among the stars. Since the caster’s spells are sacrificed, they are said to be “jammed.”

Fantasy Cosmology

Each solar system is enclosed in a massive black shell called a Crystal Sphere. Since it engulfs an entire solar system, its size is truly immense. All empty space within a sphere between planetary bodies is called “wildspace.”



Outside the shell is an endless ocean of turbulent, multicolored, explosive, fluorescent gas called “phlogiston.” All the Crystal Spheres float within, and travel from one Sphere to another requires a trek across this exotic expanse. No extra-dimensional magic works in the Flow including *bags of holding*, *portable holes*, *monster summoning* spells, and so forth.

Deities can only manifest full powers within a Crystal Sphere containing an established place of worship with at least 200 faithful followers. Thus, deities venerated by spacefaring cultures are often found in multiple spheres whereas lesser known deities may only have influence in a single Crystal Sphere.

Each core game world exists within its own Crystal Sphere. For example, the planet Toril from *Forgotten Realms* is in the Realmspace sphere. Oerth, home to the fabled city of Greyhawk, is in Greyspace. Krynn of the *Dragonlance* campaign is nestled in Krynnspace. These three spheres float near one another in the phlogiston, making trade and travel among them common.

The phlogiston, also called the Flow, has currents like mighty rivers. In many cases, these flows move in one direction meaning returning where you started requires a different route than you came. Sometimes the flow moves at different speeds in opposite directions. For example, it may take 15 days to reach Realmspace from Greyspace, but to reach Greyspace from Realmspace takes 22 days.

Travel among solar systems consists of moving through wildspace within a Crystal Sphere, finding a portal or exit out, flowing with the phlogiston, and then finding an entrance into the desired Crystal Sphere.

Air and Gravity

All physical bodies (except Crystal Spheres) exhibit gravity. If a person leaves the atmosphere of a planet, gravity causes an atmosphere envelope to surround him. A six-foot tall person would have a personal bubble approximately 18 feet across. This provides breathable air for 2d10 turns (20 to 200 minutes).

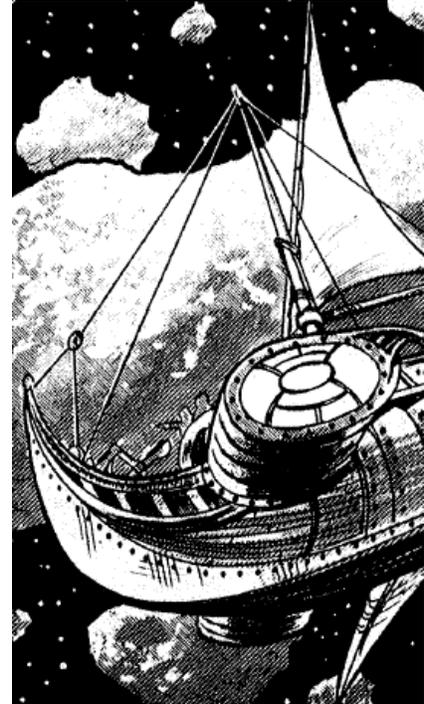


The larger the object, the larger it's air bubble. A sailing ship retains a bubble large enough to sustain a crew for months, and sailing into a planet's atmosphere refreshes the bubble. This allows an uncovered ocean ship to "sail" in space powered by a spelljammer helm with a crew walking around on deck able to breathe.

Gravity on a planet pulls toward the center. Gravity on a smaller object, such as a ship, is a horizontal linear plane. Thus gravity is subjective. You can walk on the deck of the ship, and gravity pulls you down. You could also walk on the bottom of the ship, and gravity pulls you up! Ships designed to never make landfall take advantage of this by building on both sides of the gravity plane so some of the crew walks on top of the ship and some on the bottom at the same time!

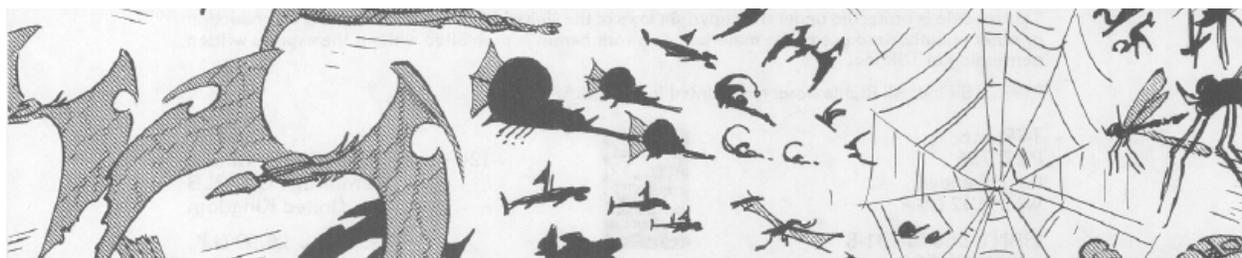
If a crew breathes the ship's air bubble, after several months, the air becomes fouled. It is still breathable but stinks and is difficult to extract oxygen from. This results in fatigue and penalties on ability and combat checks. Eventually, fouled air is depleted and results in unconsciousness and death. A captain should be aware over-crewing a ship, picking up survivors or prisoners, or otherwise adding people reduces the time before air quality decreases or runs out.

Ships can mingle air, so if an unwary captain sides up to a derelict with bad air, his air quality is lessened.



Civilization

Spelljamming has existed a long time and partially explains why certain races (humans, elves, and dwarves) are prolifically found all over the Known Spheres. Some space races are not commonly encountered on most planets. Occasionally planetary monsters are prolific and organized in space!



Beholders

There are huge populations of beholders in space. Fortunately, they are racist xenophobes embroiled in a horrendous civil war. A beholder hates any other beholder who does not look like it does. For example, some beholders have snakelike eyestalks where others have jointed stalks. These two groups will fight one another to the death if given opportunity.



Elves

The haughty space elves believe they are tasked with protecting elven nations across the spheres. At the heart of this belief is the Elven Imperial Navy, a rigid military unit consisting of beautiful living spelljammer ships.

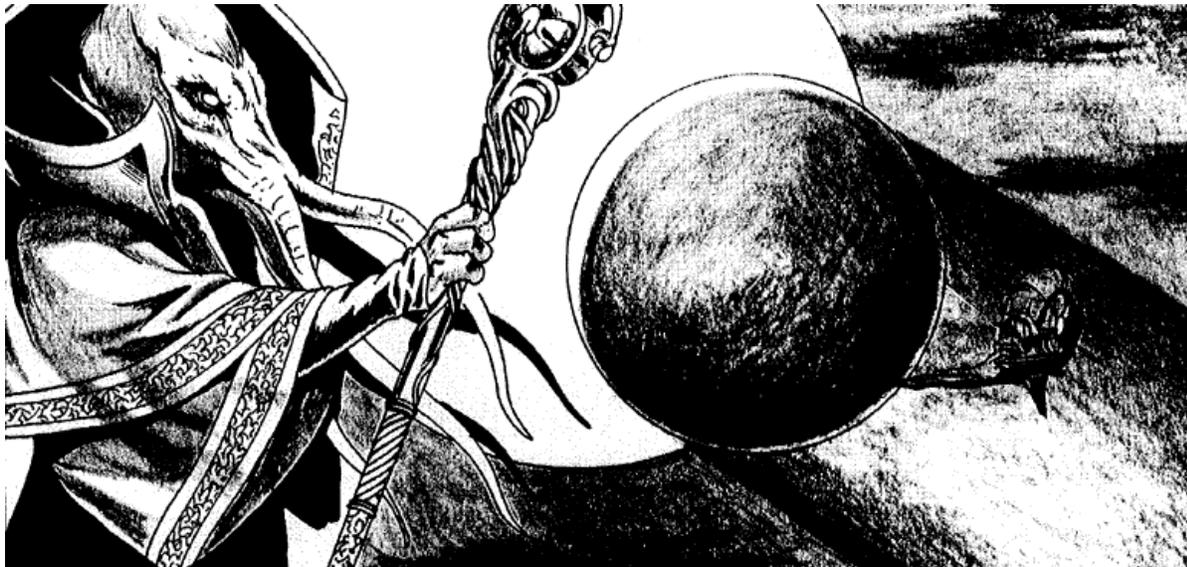
Elves have been known to go to war against those they deem a threat to their way of life. The Unhuman Wars involved massive numbers of elven warships and hordes of goblinoids and orcs in their own ragtag fleet. The result was the shattering of “unified” goblin presence in space.

Lizard Men

Perhaps originally used as slaves by various races heading into space, lizard men are prolific among spacefaring civilizations. They are smarter and more civilized than those found on groundling worlds.

Mind Flayers

Mind flayers, or illithids, are a major spacefaring race with navies and colonies and often engage in trade instead of outright hostility. Illithids are often reviled due to their diet of humanoid brains, but those willing to deal with them find them excellent traders and merchants. Illithids hate light, and their ships are often completely enclosed. The mind flayer nautiloid ship is a fearsome sight to most travelers.



Neogi

Part moray eel, part spider, the neogi are decadent slavers hated throughout the Known Spheres. They enslave umber hulks and often raid other ships for slaves and treasure.



Ship Design

Groundlings often bolt a spelljammer helm to what they are familiar with, such as a sailing ship, cog, or warship. The result is a flying ship designed for water travel moving through space. The advantage is the ship could land in a sufficiently large body of water in the future.

Spacefaring civilizations usually build vessels more suited to the facts of space travel. They may take advantage of gravity planes or design to land on water, ground, or not land at all, only dock at a space port!

The size of a ship is measured in “tons” representing a measure of breathable air. Some hull designs are primarily used by particular races. Sometimes this is due to the fear or hatred such a ship inspires. For example, a human captain trying to sail a neogi deathspider may find himself attacked on sight!

Space Adventures

What can you expect playing in a *Spelljammer* campaign? Some games you fly around seeing what you run across. You may get involved in trade going from planet to planet or sphere to sphere. Pirates plague the space lanes, and wiping them out (or running for your life) comes up often! War is an ever present fact, and various groups hire mercenaries for dangerous missions. Vast tracts of space are unexplored, and the curious are always seeking to find things never seen before or lost to time.



Be prepared for a diverse range of encounters because space is the ultimate melting pot. You may find yourself on a dense jungle-shrouded asteroid one minute and aboard a neogi slave ship the next. Anything can happen!