

Dare to know

Space Operas (Comics)

Large-scale action and adventure comics involving space travel.

A sub-genre that involves vast distances, strange worlds and cultures, swashbuckling action, and epic, panoramic settings. Even though “space operas” popularized science fiction in the 1920s and 1930s, the term was used as a pejorative by author Wilson Tucker in 1941, and many hardcore fans similarly scorned them. Ultimately, though, the form was widely recognized as a legitimate literary sub-genre by the 1990s. Space operas are distinguished by sweeping themes, emotional plots, and a sizable cast of larger-than-life characters. Protagonists typically take on matters larger than themselves, and plots depict their struggles to prevail. There is usually a romantic and/or melodramatic approach to storytelling, and the narrative contains a great deal of adventure. Stories take place on a sprawling, galactic-sized backdrop with an array of planets, galaxies, and dimensions—each possessing a distinctive flora and fauna, as well as unique life forms, customs, and civilizations. Many plots involve intergalactic rivalries and conflicts, intrigue, and events that can span the known universe and affect thousands, if not millions, of lives. This formula is suitable for lengthy story and character arcs. The stories do not always hold true to the accepted laws of science, mathematics, or the nature of space. Indeed, technology is ubiquitous but secondary to the plot. While some technological aspects may be explained, most are simply accepted within the narrative as a fact. Common toposes include mysteries from the depths of space, the rise and fall of whole civilizations, entire species of alien races, and empires that span star systems or even galaxies. Modern reworkings of the sub-genre have replaced the optimistic, “gee whiz” tone of yesteryear with one that is darker, more pessimistic, and cynical. Recent authors and artists have depicted a humanity who is not preeminent in the universe and whose future is far from secure. Phillip Francis Nowlan’s *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (1929-1967) and Dell Comics’ Tom Corbett, *Space Cadet* (1952-1954) are classic examples.

Common Elements

Epic scope
Colorful and dramatic space adventures
Peril

Quests
Heroic protagonists
Vile antagonists
Risk-taking action

Interstellar war
Galactic politics
Deep space exploration

Harrowing escapes
Rebellion

Graphic Novel Examples

<i>Ascender Volume 1: The Haunted Galaxy</i> (2019) by Jeff Lemire and Dustin Nguyen
<i>Descender Volume 1: Tin Stars</i> (2017) by Jeff Lemire and Dustin Nguyen
<i>Dreadstar Volume 1: Metamorphosis Odyssey</i> (2000) by Jim Starlin
<i>Dune: Book 1</i> (2020) by Frank Herbert, Brian Herbert, Kevin J. Anderson, Raúl Allén, and Patricia Martin
<i>ODY-C Cycle One</i> (2016) by Matt Fraction and Christian Ward
<i>Saga Book One</i> (2014) by Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples
<i>Space Riders Volume 1</i> (2015) by Fabian Rangel and Alexis Ziritt

<i>Starlight</i> (2015) by Mark Millar and Goran Parlov
<i>Star Wars: Agent of the Empire Volume 1: Iron Eclipse</i> (2012) by John Ostrander, Stephane Roux, and Stephane Crety
<i>Star Wars: Crimson Empire</i> (1998) by Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley
<i>Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic</i> (2006) by John Jackson Miller and Brian Ching
<i>Valerian: The Complete Collection Volume 1</i> (2017) by Pierre Christin and Jean-Claude Mézières