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**Name-the-Game Contest Winners:**
James McKnight, Randall Petras, David Martin

The Intention System inspired by The Apocalypse

## Spectrum Games

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# In Memory of...
# Glen A. Larson
## (1937 - 2014)

"[The shows I created were] enjoyable, they had a pretty decent dose of humor and they all struck a chord out there in the mainstream. What we weren't going to win... was a shelf full of Emmys. Ours were not the shows that were doing anything more than reaching a core audience. I would like to think that they brought a lot of entertainment into the living room."

— Glen A. Larson

**Thanks for all the years of fun you've given us!**

# Foreword by
# Richard Hatch

Due to some personal issues that have arisen, Mr. Hatch was not able to complete the foreword in time for this product's launch. As soon as Spectrum Games receives his text, we will update the PDF. I hope you understand.

# Introduction

## BLAST OFF

*Science fiction (n.):* fiction dealing principally with the impact of actual or imagined science on society or individuals or having a scientific factor as an essential orienting component.

Now, add disco! This is *RETROSTAR*!

These days, science fiction can be found on virtually every television channel. It's everywhere. One only has to turn on the television in order to find starship battles, post-apocalyptic survivors, malevolent aliens and robots of all kind.

But that wasn't always the case.

There was a time, back in the 1970s, when science fiction was pretty hard to come by on television. Not only was it fairly rare, but much of it wasn't overtly "science fiction" per se. For every full-on science fiction series – *Battlestar Galactica, Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, Space: 1999,* etc. – there was a series that minimized the science fiction elements to one degree or another; shows such as *The Six Million Dollar Man, Man From Atlantis* and *The Bionic Woman*, for instance.

Regardless of how many sci-fi trappings were present in these programs, they all had one common denominator: charm! That's right; charm. No, they didn't boast computer-generated special effects, nor did they typically display terribly deep storytelling. They seldom had a massive budget and the acting ranged from good to abysmal, often within the same series. Continuity was commonly spotty as well and nobody was going to confuse the writing for high art.

But that was fine and dandy, because these television shows were fun and that's what made us tune in every week. We longed for adventure and they delivered that in spades! So what if we could tell that the robot was made of cheap plastic? Who cared if the camera was just being tilted back and forth to give the illusion of the spaceship being hit? You say the laser blasts looked hokey? Big deal. We wanted a fun science fiction story and that's exactly what we got.

If you understand where we're coming from, then *Retrostar* may very well be the game for you! Our goal was to create a game that captured the essence of these shows from beginning to end. We wanted to bring all the fun, excitement and, yes, cheesiness of the 1970s-era science fiction television shows to life for you and the rest of your game group. This required us to study and analyze the various TV shows of the time, taking them apart, figuring out how to best reflect the tropes with the rules and putting it all back together into a faithful, cohesive game.

*Retrostar* is not a "universal" sci-fi roleplaying game. While it's certainly wide open for the creation of your own series, every nuance of the game system was fashioned to recreate the style of action and adventure cultivated by the science fiction television shows of the 1970s. Trying to use it for anything drastically different is like attempting to fit a square peg into a round hole.

However, if it's a rollicking good time while playing space adventurers, starship pilots, robots and the like, you're in the right place. So, strap in and get ready for the ride of your life. Just don't expect that ride to have amazing special effects.

## ABOUT ROLEPLAYING GAMES

The roleplaying game is, at its core, an exercise in interactive storytelling for you and your friends to engage in. You gather around a table (or other convenient space), consume snack foods, roll some dice and enjoy each other's company while working together to tell a story, using the game rules found in this book as a guide.

To put it in a way that ties more closely to the source material, when you play *Retrostar*, you and your group effectively collaborate on the creation of a television series, one episode at a time. This is done verbally for the most part,

though some of the information is recorded on various sheets (more on that later). Unlike with actual television shows, however, you don't have to follow a rigid, pre-set script. It's mostly improvised, which means that there's practically no limit to what can happen. Pretty exciting, no?

This all sounds pretty vague at this point, so let's reel it in a bit and get specific.

One participant acts as the *Showrunner*. The Showrunner is like the creator, director and producer of an actual television series, all rolled into one. Their job is to create the basics of the story, set the scene, govern the flow of the action and control the supporting characters (called, appropriately enough, Showrunner *Characters* or *SCs*).

The rest of the participants are called *players*. Each player steps into the role of one of the story's central herœs (called *Player Characters* or *PCs*). It is their tale that will be told as the game unfolds. The most direct comparison is

to the actors portraying the main protagonists of a television show. They get to experience the story vicariously through their characters. The players aren't just going along for the ride, though. The choices they make regarding their characters' actions can shape and alter the very course of the story. That's what makes roleplaying games so different than other types of games.

So far, it sounds like there's no real need for the game rules at all, but while the story can progress quite far without using the rules, there will come a time when the success of the characters will be in doubt. That's when it's time to pick up the dice and bring the rules into the picture. And this is where RPGs differ from television shows. In television shows, there's no wiggle room for what's going to happen; whatever the writer says is going to happen

*will* happen. It's set in stone. This is not the case in a roleplaying game. The Showrunner may know what's going on in a general sense, but the decisions made by the players and the way the dice roll may send the story off into directions he or she had never even considered. That's what makes the game fun for Showrunners! They have to go with the flow and keep the story rolling forward, adapting to those decisions and rolls along the way.

You now know the basics of how roleplaying games function. However, it will become much clearer with an example of play, which is exactly what you'll find below. For purposes of this brief example, all references to the game rules have been generalized, since you don't yet know what they mean. When you see text in quotation marks, it represents the participant speaking as their character.

## Example of Play

*Dean is playing Duke Carter, the cynical captain of a small spaceship that has been customized for deep space exploration. Valerie is playing Astra Collins, his wise co-pilot and right-hand woman. Shelly is playing Alena Brennan, the mechanic and "muscle" of the group. James is the Showrunner.*

*Earlier in the game, their spaceship was caught in an asteroid field, causing some damage to its engines. The result? A risky crash-landing on a remote forest planet, where they managed to land in a large clearing surrounded by thick woods. As we join them, they are attempting to figure out a way to get the ship back off the ground.*

**Shelly:** Alena immediately heads to the engine room to see how bad the damage is.

**James:** After checking out the damage, she surmises that it's pretty serious. It can be fixed, but it's going to take time.

**Shelly:** How much time?

**James:** We're talking twelve hours or so. It would be about half of that if you had large sheets of metal to patch the holes with. Unfortunately, you'll have to make due with whatever to can assimilate from the ship's interior. That's why it's going to take so long.

**Shelly:** She's going to go back to the front with the others and tell them the bad news: "There's no way we're getting off this rock in less than twelve hours unless we can get a hold of some metal."

**Dean:** *[sarcastically]* "Lovely. I doubt this place has any intelligent species living here, so getting metal is going to be impossible."

**Valerie:** "Never judge a book by its cover, Duke. The planet's initial impression may be deceiving."

**James:** You all hear the sound of movement in the woods.

**Dean:** Duke looks out the nearest viewport to see what's going on. *[the others quickly echo his sentiment]*

**James:** About a dozen lizard-like humanoids wearing loincloths and wielding spears and clubs emerge from the tree-line. They are cautiously approaching the ship. You get the distinct impression that they've never seen a spaceship before.

**Dean:** "What's that you were saying about initial impressions and such, Astra?"

**Shelly:** "There's no need to be a smart-aleck, Duke. She may still be right. These aliens might look primitive, but they may yet surprise us."

**Dean:** *[sarcastically]* "Oh, sure. I'll bet they're real cuddly and those crude weapons probably shoot laser beams too."

**James:** While you banter with each other, the lizard men are closing in on the spaceship. Their weapons are still at the ready. What do you want to do?

**Shelly:** Well, we can't really take any chances, so Alena will keep her laser pistol handy without appearing overtly hostile.

**Valerie:** Astra will use her Space Tarot Cards to try to determine the aliens' intentions.

**Dean:** Duke sits down in a chair and kicks his feet up on the table. He laughs and says, "I don't know why you two are getting all riled up over a bunch of simpleton lizard guys. It's not like they can use their spears and clubs to break into the ship. I say we just ignore 'em and concentrate on getting the ship fixed."

**James:** Suddenly, you all hear a sharp buzzing noise followed by the rumbling of mechanical ship parts. Through the porthole, you see that one of the lizard men now has a large-ish remote control device in his hands and he's pushing some chunky red buttons on it. Whatever the gadget is, it's causing the ship's cargo door to slowly open.

**Shelly:** Alena gets behind cover, just in case they are hostile.

**Valerie:** Astra puts down the Space Tarot Cards and gives Duke a look. "You were saying?"

**Dean:** "Me and my big mouth."

*[The game continues from there, with all participants shaping the story as it unfolds]*

## IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

With our explanation of roleplaying games out of the way, we can now focus on *Retrostar* specifically, exploring some of the important concepts as well as a few aspects that make the game perfectly suited for emulating the science-fiction television shows of the 1970s.

### The Series
Unlike many RPGs, *Retrostar* dœsn't have one specific setting. Instead, it allows the Showrunner to create their own setting (which we call a "Series", in keeping with the subject matter). In
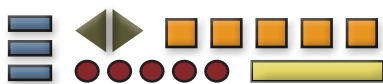
### What You Need

In order to participate in a game of *Retrostar*, there are some things that you'll need to have on hand:

• Each player will need some standard 6-sided dice (about six of them should suffice).

• Each player will need a character sheet, useful for recording information about characters. A blank one can be found at the back of this book and as a PDF on our website (spectrum-games.com).

• The Showrunner will need to bring two types of tokens. It dœsn't matter what they are, as long as they look different. Five tokens of each type per player is about right.

• Pencils and scrap paper can be handy assets to have around as well.

fact, the rulebook has a detailed chapter that teaches them how to do so, along with a lot of advice for giving their series a seventies-licious vibe. Additionally, we have included several sample series for Showrunners to use if they'd rather not create one from scratch.

Each Series has its own Series Bible, a multi-page log where all the pertinent information about the setting can be recorded; information such as the background/history, the technology, the protagonists and, of course, the antagonists. Also included is a set of Dials (Thematic, Plot, Recurring, Cheese and SFX) that are rated from 0 to 6. Dials help truly define the feel of the series and have in-game effects that can impact the series.

### Episodes
Each Episode represents a single story (or in the case of longer, more involved stories, a large chunk of the story). All told, a single Episode should feel like an hour-long episode of an actual television series and can be finished during a single session.

### Seasons
TV seasons were anywhere from 6-22 or more episodes. A *Retrostar* Series should be no different. The Showrunner should tell the players when they are nearing the end of a Season, and all the Plot should usually build and build to an epic climax and/ or cliffhanger.

### The Characters
There are two kinds of characters in *Retrostar*: Player Characters (PCs) and Showrunner Characters (SCs). The former characters are controlled by the players (thus acting as the central protagonists) while the latter characters are controlled by the Showrunner (thus acting as the supporting cast).

Player Characters are largely defined by the following aspects:

• ***Background:*** This is a concise description of the character's role within the series. Think

of this as the show producer's notes on each character. An example: "Macho yet sensitive, outlaw spirit, tough guy, very anti-authority, honorable and loyal to his friends and all the runners, always sticks up for the little guy. Veteran of the war, but would rather not talk about. Has a way with the ladies and definitive charm."

• **Casting:** Casting is the look and tone of the character, summed up in 25 words or less. For example: "Roguish smile, feathered brown hair, smooth voice, ornery sparkle in his eye, athletically built, earth-toned clothes".

• **Traits:** Each character possesses three Traits that largely determine how good they are in certain areas. The Traits are *Adventure* (how suited they are for action), *Thought* (their mental faculties) and *Drama* (their charisma and strength of will). They are rated from -1 (terrible) to 2 (outstanding), with 0 being more or less average.

• **Descriptors:** Each Trait that is rated 1 or more will have one or more Descriptors that reflect areas of expertise or talent (Hotshot Pilot, Perceptive, Con Artist, etc.), while each Trait that is rated -1 will have a Descriptor that reflects an area of weakness (Clumsy, Ditzy, Socially Awkward, etc.).

• **SFX:** SFX is a list of special effects that the character has access to during the game; anything that would require a budget to create if it was a real TV show could be included here—a laser pistol, alien power, rocket pack, the ability to leap extreme distances and so forth. Since the 1970s TV shows had relatively tight budgets, each character has a pool of points to spend on their SFX throughout the game.

• **Personal Dials:** Player Characters have Dials, just like a series does. However, these aren't defined prior to the series' first episode. They develop as the game progresses, allowing characters to become more fleshed out organically as time goes on.

Most Showrunner Characters are much, much simpler than Player Characters, but that's beyond the scope of this section.

## Time Management
The stories in the sci-fi TV shows of the 1970s were told in the span of 45 minutes or so, which meant that the writers had to be very concise and budget the screen-time wisely so that it would all fit. To reflect that, *Retrostar* uses time management rules. Time Management limits the number of die rolls players can make in an episode. Every roll is significant. Just as importantly, every roll moves the action forward towards the exciting conclusion of the episode.

Each episode has five Acts and each Act allows for the players to make a total of 12 die rolls. Once those 12 die rolls have been made, the next Act begins.

In *Retrostar*, the die rolls a player makes are called Intentions and those familiar with RPGs will find the resolution mechanic different from other games. *Retrostar* is not concerned with each individual action; rather it is concerned with what a character is doing to move the scene forward.

## THE SOURCE MATERIAL

Most everyone is at least marginally familiar with science fiction. However, the science fiction that graced the small screen during the 1970s had some interesting facets that many people may not know about. It's time to put the genre (if you can truly call it that) under the proverbial microscope, shall we?

## Target Audience
There are two broad categories of 1970s science fiction shows: traditional and kidvid.

Traditional shows were hour-long programs geared toward young adults and up. While younger people certainly watched them,

many of the more sophisticated nuances went over their heads. These shows tended to vary in their tone, but they were usually played pretty straight, despite a cute kid, robot or critter thrown in here and there to provide comic relief. Death happened with at least some regularity, though it was somewhat rare for a major character to buy the farm. Actions had consequences and sometimes those consequences were grave indeed.

By contrast, kidvid was pretty much what its name suggests: half-hour programs that targeted much younger audiences. Most of them were fairly serious, but some were played largely for guffaws. Regardless, the tone of kidvid shows was much lighter than their more mature counterparts. Death didn't usually happen, though the supposed threat of it may have loomed at times. Morality leaned more toward "black and white" and clear cut "morals of the story" were commonly threaded throughout the episodes.

## Sub-Genres

When the average person hears the term "science fiction", their mind conjures up images of furious dogfights involving spaceships, evil galactic tyrants and battles with laser-gun blasts filling the air. Make no mistake—those things were extremely common in the science fiction television shows of the 1970s. However, there were numerous shows that had none of that! Some of them contained hardly any science fiction elements at all; others were bristling with them.

To say that 1970s-era science fiction shows had great variety would be an understatement of the highest order. You had space adventure shows (*Battlestar Galactica*, *Buck Rogers*, *Blake's 7*, etc.), post-apocalyptic shows (*Logan's Run*, *Ark II*, etc.), secret agent shows (*Six Million Dollar Man*, *The Bionic Woman*, etc.) comedy shows (*Quark*, *Mork & Mindy*, *Far Out Space Nuts*, etc.), horror shows (*Kolchak: the Night Stalker*, *Monster Squad*, etc.), superhero shows (*Wonder Woman*, *The Incredible Hulk*,

etc.), lost-world shows (*Land of the Lost*, *Lidsville*, etc.), fantasy shows (*Ace of Wands*, etc.) and so much more.

## Limited Budget

Money makes the world go 'round, or so they say. It can certainly buy high-quality special effects in abundance, that's for sure. Movies of the era, such as Star Wars, proved that beyond a shadow of a doubt. Unfortunately, television shows were saddled with a fraction of the budgets that their big-screen equivalents enjoyed.

This fact required frugal thinking by those creating such programs. They had to improvise and search for clever ways to bring the shows to life without breaking the bank. This required ingenuity! They employed stock footage, utilized re-purposed set pieces from other shows, hired lackluster (or even downright terrible) actors, devised useful camera tricks to hide imperfections, put to use off-the-rack costumes for aliens, and created robots, spaceships and gadgets from common household items.

All these techniques may have looked less-than-stellar, but they somehow added to the shows' charm. Dœs it really matter that we can see the zipper on the ape-man suit or that we saw the squirt-gun they used as a laser pistol down at the local five-and-dime? Who cares if that spaceship from one show looks exactly like the post-apocalyptic land bus (sans wheels) from another show that was cancelled last year? Dœs the fact that it looks the same every time the starship takes off from the landing bay spoil the fun?

What these shows lacked in state-of-the-art special effects, they made up for in sheer, unadulterated fun!

## Products of Their Time

There was no escaping the era in which these shows were born. The decade of the 1970s had its fingerprints all over them. Even in the far-flung future, everyone had perms or feathered hair; guys sported over-sized sideburns

and bushy mustaches; earthy colors such as avocado, sunflower and harvest gold were everywhere, from décor to clothing (ditto for sharp black and white contrasts); technology was chunky and crude looking with lots of big buttons, toggle switches, cords, knobs and monochrome green computer monitors; jumpsuits, leisure suits and tunics reigned supreme among the fashionistas of the centuries to come.

And then there was disco.

Disco was ubiquitous. It seemed that few shows could resist the temptation to include a disco-dancing scene at some point. It didn't even have to make sense in the context of the story. It was this omnipresent force that permeated virtually every aspect of the last half of the decade.

Disco wasn't the only fad that made it into the sci-fi shows. No, no, no. If something was popular at the time, you could bet the mortgage that it would weasel its way onto your television screen in some form or another. Yoga, spiritualism, roller skating, kung-fu, CB radios, truck-driving, mopeds, palm reading, pet rocks, puka shells, skateboarding, surfing, platform shœs, women's lib, lava lamps, mood rings, waterbeds, macramé and stunt biking—all of these things (and more) were fair game for television shows!

## Signature Conventions

There were certain themes, plots, tropes and notions that seemed to pop up with alarming regularity. In this section, we'll delve into some of them. Keep in mind that not all of these listings were present in every show. Each show was basically a hodge-podge of these, cherry-picked by those who wrote the episodes.

• **Pooches and Bots:** In an effort to appeal to the younger viewers, the shows would commonly feature cute kids and (or) some manner of pet or sidekick (from robots to monkeys to robotic dogs). Such characters were typically



there solely to provide chuckles or to allow for heartwarming scenes.

• **Capable Females:** The '70s was the era of the Women's Lib movement and females who could more than hold their own made their presence felt in these programs. Whether they were butt-kickers and name-takers, highly-skilled scientists or manipulative schemers, these ladies didn't play second-fiddle to men just because of gender.

• **Damsel in Distress:** Okay, so the empowerment of women in fiction hadn't *completely* taken hold yet. While capable females were becoming a more prominent aspect of these shows, the hold-outs were still around in abundance. Some women seemed to exist only to spring the male herœs into action in an effort to save them.

• **Villain of the Week:** This formula involved almost every episode having a different primary antagonist rather than one persistent adversary who caused trouble each week.

• **Tone-Shifts:** Usually occurring between seasons and especially if viewership was down, it wasn't unheard of for a series to undergo radical alterations with little or no explanation. Characters could be dropped (or added), the show's setting could be entirely different, the format could be overhauled or a time-jump could take place. These changes seldom produced favorable results, either artistically or in regards to viewership.

• **Star Wars-isms:** When Star Wars came to theaters in 1977, it quickly became a phenomenon and practically everyone scrambled to capitalize on its popularity. Some shows borrowed more heavily from it than others. Some simply attempted to capture the free-wheeling feel of the movie, while others copied its æsthetics or even its characters. Probably the most common Star Wars-ism is the inclusion of a tyrannical galactic empire.

• **Bloodless Violence:** Not counting kidvid, violence played a major role in these shows, but it seldom produced blood. For one thing, the censors would have gone crazy in that era and for another thing, showing such grievous injuries would have been draining on the budget.

• **Renaming:** To get across the fact that the show was science fiction and often not set on Earth, mundane objects, activities and animals were given different names: dogs might be called "woofs", monetary coins might become "cred-disks", cars might be given the name "zoomers" and beverages might be known as "slurps". It's a cheap way to make even everyday things sound somehow exotic... at least in theory.

• **Character Demotion:** Once-important characters sometimes found themselves relegated to being background characters or, worse still, merely extras with no speaking lines. They're just seen in the distance, manning one of the many consoles on the space cruiser or passing by in the hallway as the main characters head out on an adventure.

• **The Pilot Movie or Mini-Series:** Most shows had a pilot episode, but a few of them actually had a pilot movie or mini-series, complete with a relatively cushy budget. Some sequences from this movie would typically be used as stock footage in the series itself in an effort to make the episodes look like they had higher production values than they really did. Also, for various reasons, a few aspects of the show would change between the movie/mini-series and the series proper.

• **Rotating Focus:** For shows with ensemble casts, the writers would sometimes put the spotlight on one or two characters for an entire episode (or at least most of an episode). This gave everyone a few opportunities to truly shine and sometimes served as a potential backdoor pilot for a spin-off series.

• **Sex Appeal:** Kidvid notwithstanding, these shows had a penchant to feature attractive characters in skimpy or suggestive clothes. Females would be in low-cut, skintight bodysuits, while the men would be in, well, low-cut, skintight bodysuits (with plenty of exposed chest hair). Okay, so this is a little bit of an over-generalization, but only just. The bottom line is that the characters would occasionally (or constantly) be seen wearing attire that accentuated the actors' positives.

• **Barely Alien at All:** You've seen them before—aliens that looked suspiciously like humans. Perhaps they had green body paint, an enlarged head, pointed ears, three eyes or some other trivial characteristic... but they were still unmistakably humans with an attachment. Obviously, this had a lot to do with the aforementioned low budgets and less to do with a lack of creativity.

• **One-Note Cultures:** Look, the writers only had an hour to work with (or 30 minutes in the case of kidvid), so it was a logistical impossibility for them to develop in-depth cultures every time they turn around. This was especially true for series in which the characters discovered

*Adam's Ark*, a Series incorporating Mormon themes, such as marriage for "time and eternity" and a council of twelve never made it to air when it was pitched in the 1960s. However, in the 1970s, it did. With some subtle changes. *Adam's Ark*, of course, became *Battlestar Galactica*. Science fiction is often a wonderful storytelling method for delivering subversive messages. It allows a creator the chance to twist the lens ever-so-slightly, and present ideas in an all new way. Similarly, it allows a creator the chance to incorporate ideas from any source material (the kitchen sink approach), because... the future. Because... science fiction.

So, if your imagined future has roller skating samurai, that is what will be memorable to viewers. But, what about when there is a real depth, subtle or not, to the backstory? Science fiction allows a creator the chance to tell an interesting story through a new medium, and through a different lens. And when a creator has an agenda, that can be even more interesting. Sometimes these messages are subtle, and sometimes the creator might as well be hitting the viewer over the head with a two-by-four. Remember: take a scientific principle; pose a question or hypothesis about that principle; and then explore the effects of that principle on society/culture.
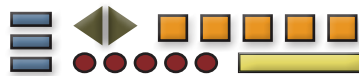
new races or civilizations on a regular basis. The result was ordinarily cultures based on one trait, belief or role. For example, a race might have a warrior culture or a 1920s-era mobster culture; or perhaps a culture that resembled, say, Mexican or French culture. This approach relied a lot on stereotypes, but made things a lot easier on the writers and gave the viewer an immediate grasp on what the culture is all about without requiring excessive exposition.

• **Bottle Episodes:** One cost-cutting technique regularly put to use was to produce a low-cost episode or two, especially after a particularly expensive episode. This was accomplished by using very few (if any) supporting actors and crafting a character-driven story that lacked special effects and inevitably took place in a single location.

• **Improbable Coincidence:** Sometimes, co-incidences were just destined to happen in these shows, no matter how contrived or shœ-horned the whole situation was. This happened largely to keep the story moving along at a brisk pace, throwing out realism for the sake of brevity.

• **Opening Monologue:** Before the opening credits and title sequence of each episode, many shows kicked things off with a short voice-over narration that gave new viewers a quick overview of the series' premise.

## A VISUAL GUIDE TO THE 1970S

It may be that you weren't around during the 1970s or simply that you may have forgotten how the decade looked. In either case, we're here to give you a brief rundown of the æsthetics.

### Colors and Patterns

The color palette that dominated the 1970s was relatively drab and subdued compared to the bright and psychedelic palette that defined the previous decade. As the decade wore on, the tones became earthier and warmer, likely due to society's yearning for peace and calmness following the tumultuous Vietnam War.

Trendy colors were avocado green, turquoise, sunshine yellow, harvest gold, orange and varying shades of brown and beige. White was used everywhere – in costumes, vehicles and virtually anything else, as well as for backgrounds to offset brighter colors. The mindset at the time was that white looked futuristic, especially if one or more contrasting colors were used for accents.

While the 1970s boasted many different patterns, piping/stripes was used a great deal. Sometimes, the piping was subtle; other times, it was about as subtle as a brick to the face.



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### Contemporary Fashions

Some series took place in contemporary times (i.e., the 1970s), so the clothes for such series can easily be ascertained by viewing photos of the era. A quick internet search will prove to be most enlightening.

The fashions of the early years of the decade largely resembled less-flamboyant versions of the late-1960s fashions. It wasn't until close to the middle of the decade that the styles most people commonly associate with the 1970s rose to prominence.

Polyester was king! It invaded nearly every aspect of fashion, especially (but not exclusively) menswear. You just couldn't avoid it.

Tight pants were becoming increasingly popular for both genders and flared pant legs were shrinking more and more as time went on, all but dissipating by 1979. Toward the last half of the decade, pant suits, track suits and leisure suits were extremely common. Speaking of pants, the 1970s represented the first time that

women regularly wore them in every walk of life. Skirts and dresses persevered and would continue to do so, but they were being edged out by trousers.

Other popular clothing articles that defined the era: striped v-neck velour shirts, platform shoes, tunics, culottes, robes, gold medallions, tight t-shirts, cowl-neck sweaters, wedge heels, flower-patterned dress shirts, tennis headbands, flower-collared shirts, suntan pantyhose, breezy disco dresses, overalls and so forth.

## Futuristic Fashions
What was futuristic-looking to the people of the 1970s looks dated and even a bit silly to those in the early 21st century. But, that's half the charm.

The creators/costumers usually took existing fashions and put a "futuristic" spin on them. Jumpsuits and tunics were especially popular for this. As mentioned earlier, white was considered very futuristic, especially with one color to add a splash to the look (sometimes more than one color). Silver and black were also common colors used with the purpose of seeming futuristic.

Not all sci-fi shows followed these colors, however. Many took a more grounded approach, using a lot of earth tones/browns. The colors were more subdued and the styles were more utilitarian.



## Hairstyles
Feathered hair was extremely popular, especially in the last half of the 1970s, for both men and women. Men had longer hair than in previous decades, not counting the styles worn by hippies in the 1960s. That said, most men on TV didn't boast terribly long hair; just long enough to allow for the hair to color most of all of the ears. Women's hair lengths varied drastically, with short-ish hair becoming quite popular as well as the more traditional longer lengths.

Afros stuck around throughout most of the '70s, slowly decreases in size with each passing year. Even by the decade's end, however, they were still popular.

Full beards were common sights on men, as were pronounced (and even huge) sideburns. Ditto for big mustaches. Then there was chest hair! Lots and lots of chest hair.

## Weapons
Futuristic series usually featured high-tech ranged weapons, especially laser guns. Keep in mind that budgets were tight, so many such weapons were relatively simple looking. Such weapons (along with other gadgets) tended to be very angular in shape and chunky in size.

## Vehicles
Series that took place in the future were laden with spaceships, aircraft, cars and every other type of vehicle one could imagine. As with weapons, many shows had very limited budgets to work with, so the vehicles often looked a bit cheap, though there are numerous exceptions.

Most vehicles were pretty blocky but with an attempt at making them look streamlined and sleek. Whites and grays were almost universally used for the color of vehicles in these shows.

## Aliens

We would be remiss if we didn't discuss aliens in a science fiction game, as they were staples of the genre, even back then.

The level of detail for the look of aliens fluctuated from series to series, with budget being the deciding factor. A few series had a sufficient budget to accommodate surprisingly high-quality aliens; aliens you would expect to see in big-budget films of the era. Most of the shows, however, had to make do with a pitiful budget, which resulted in barely "alien" aliens or aliens that looked like humans with different skin colors, elongated ears, odd hairstyles/colors, extra arms that never actually move or perhaps enlarged noggins (the latter was often a visual shorthand for alien races possessing extraordinary intelligence or wisdom).

## Robots

Another sci-fi staple, robots came in all shapes and sizes, from boxy little robots that stood less than a foot tall to human-sized combat robots. Robots were seldom larger than that, however, due to the difficulties (and expense) of articulating a robot get-up that couldn't be worn by a human actor. "Cute" robots seemed to be practically everywhere! The special effects teams used great ingenuity to concoct robots that were quite believable, given the budgets constraints.
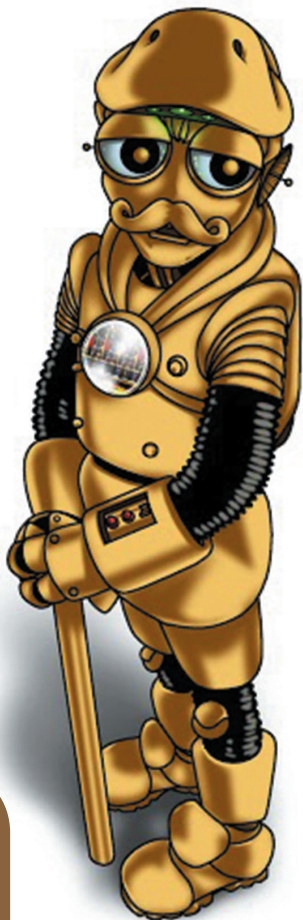
### RECOMMENDED VIEWING

We have included a selection of 1970s science fiction television shows that we feel are extremely useful for *Retrostar* Players and Showrunners. Some were included simply because they are amazing or iconic series that helped define the genre. Others were chosen not necessarily because of their quality, but because they have traits that make them particularly poignant for gamers.

### What Are These Knobs?

Toward the beginning of the chapter, we briefly mentioned that each Series has five Dials that measure certain aspects of the show as a whole.

We felt it might be useful for readers to see what the Dials would be for each of the shows we list in this section. Think of them as benchmarks of sorts.

On each Dial, in red text, you'll see an abbreviation. This lets you know which Dial it is.

• T = Thematic
• P = Plot
• R = Recurring
• C = Cheese
• SFX = SFX (of course!)

The numbers won't make much sense to you right now, but they will once you read the relevant section of this rulebook.
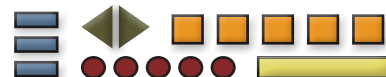
## Ark II (1976)

This kidvid series opened each episode with a voice-over narration: "For millions of years, Earth was fertile and rich. Then pollution and waste began to take their toll. Civilization fell into ruin. This is the world of the 25th century. Only a handful of scientists remain, men who have vowed to rebuild what has been destroyed. This is their achievement: Ark II, a mobile storehouse of scientific knowledge, manned by a highly trained crew of young people. Their mission: to bring the hope of a new future to mankind."

With an ethnically diverse cast, including the commander of the Ark II (Jonah), his two young peers (Ruth and Samuel) and, of course, their talking chimpanzee (Adam). Together, they travelled the wasteland in their 44-foot long mobile lab that looked much like a futuristic recreational vehicle, helping pockets of civilization out however they could. The show had no violence to speak of, so it lacked the sheer excitement of its nighttime counterparts. Still, the stories were good, cheesy fun and well worth a watch.

## Battlestar Galactica (1978-79)

"Fleeing from the Cylon tyranny, the last battlestar, *Galactica*, leads a rag-tag fugitive fleet on a lonely quest...a shining planet known as Earth." These words, spoken by the late, great Lorne Greene, concluded each episode, neatly summing up the concept of the entire show.

To elaborate, the Twelve Colonies of Mankind were led to believe that the Cylons (warrior robots who likely destroyed their reptilian creators) finally sought peace after a war that lasted a thousand years. It was a sham. The Cylons destroyed all of the colonies, leaving only a fraction of the humans alive. The survivors boarded every spaceworthy vessel they could scrounge up and headed into the unknown to find the long-lost thirteenth colony: the planet Earth.

The show focused on a handful of core characters, most of which were members of the Colonial military: the heroic Apollo, the roguish Starbuck, the wise Commander Adama, as well as a few others. Their convoy of spaceships faced a wide variety of sticky situations, many of which were related to the pursuing Cylons.

Battlestar Galactica is one of the most archetypal shows of the milieu. Every player or Showrunner should watch at least a few episodes. The writing is outstanding and the acting is top flight. Even the special effects were well done, especially considering it had a television budget.
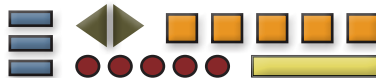
## Blake's 7 (1978-81)

In a sterile future ruled by the despotic Terran Federation, the seemingly average Roj Blake learned that he was once the leader of an organization of political dissidents who tried to fight against the oppressors. Roj had no memory of any such activities, but Bran Foster, the leader of a newer group of rebels who worked with him in the past, filled him in. The meeting was interrupted by Federation security forces (thanks to a traitor), leaving Blake the only survivor. He returned to the domed city, but was arrested on bogus charges and sent to a prison planet. Upon encountering a strange alien spacecraft, the Federation crew aboard the prison transport ship sent Blake and several others to board the craft after being repelled by the craft's defenses, considering the prisoners to be expendable. What they didn't expect, however, was Blake and crew overcoming the defenses and escaping in that spacecraft, preparing to wage war on the Terran Federation.

The titular "7" changed throughout the course of the series. Even Blake himself went missing after the second season.

## Buck Rogers in the 25th Century (1979-81)

Due to a life support malfunction, astronaut Buck Rogers was effectively cryogenically frozen in his spacecraft for over five-hundred years, until revived by the denizens of the 25th Century. He quickly learned that the world had been devastated by nuclear weapons shortly after he went into space and was now under the protection of the Earth Defense Directorate. His piloting, combat  and tactical skills proved quite an asset to the organization. He was joined by the "ballsy" (Buck's words, not ours) Commander Wilma Deering, the Defense Directorate leader Dr. Huer, the diminutive "ambuquad" robot Twiki and sentient computer named Dr. Theopolis, who took the form of a small disk that was packed around by Twiki.

During the first season, much of the villainy was provided by the femme fatale, Princess Ardala, whose goals were to take over Earth and to make Buck her concubine of sorts. She was joined by Kane, the commander of the Draconian forces. Kane has designs on Ardala, despite the fact that he's not fond of having to take orders from her. Her father is the emperor, however, so he has little choice. In the pilot movie, Kane was more defiant than he became when the show hit as a full series.

The second season was almost an entirely different show, with most of the characters disappearing altogether and the focus being on exploring the stars in search of new pockets of humanity. Wilma Deering's transition from a tough, military big-shot to a softer, less capable damsel with little authority was perhaps the most distressing change. The less-than-wonderful second season dœs not detract from the stellar first season, however.

For Season 2 of *Buck Rogers,* the Dials are as follows: T-5 P-4 R-4 C-5 SFX-5

## Doctor Who (1963-1989)

The stranger known simply as "the Doctor" comes from a remote civilization from another planet that long ago mastered the technology to travel not only through space, but also through time. He uses a time machine that's also a highly functional spaceship and, on the outside, looks like a British police phone booth from the 1950s. Seemingly capable to go anywhere in time and space (with a few plot-driven exceptions), the Doctor and his companions travel to ever new spots where they invariably have to solve a mystery and right some wrongs: it can be a dictator or tyrant, a bunch of evil robots, or a hidden monster or alien that is ultimately revealed and defeated or driven away thanks to the Doctor. Since he remains strongly opposed to violence and weapons, he always has to rely on his wits, ingenuity, scientific background and verbal skills to beat his enemies.
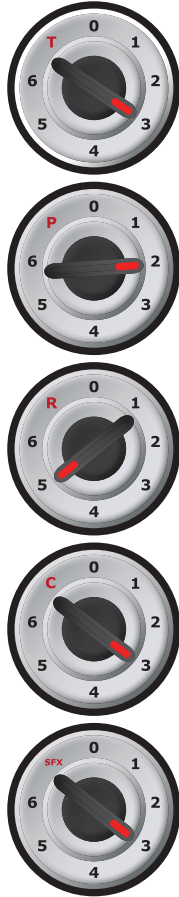
This formula could be retold in hundreds of variations, and allowed for a great variety of sets, locations, costumes, and so forth, which is only one of the reasons that Doctor Who as a program became so long-lived and popular. Children watched it, as did their parents and grandparents.

During the 1970s, the role of the Doctor was first played by Jon Pertwee (1970 to 1974), followed by Tom Baker (1974 to 1981). That decade saw some of the series' best plots, the introduction of the Whomobile, the robotic dog K9, and the master villain Davros, creator of the Daleks.

## Far Out Space Nuts (1975)

This series was legendary TV producers Sid and Marty Krofft's foray into the science-fiction territory. Viewers familiar with the other Krofft shows from the 70s and 80s will certainly recognize their style throughout the show. It centered on the bumbling duo of blue collar-style, coverall-wearing NASA maintenance workers Barney (Chuck McCann) and Junior (Bob Denver, TV's Gilligan from *Gilligan's Island*), and their furry alien companion Honk. The latter was a female of her species, and could communicate only through literally "honking" the horn-shaped tube sticking out of her head. Of course, this would get terribly annoying to television viewers' ears very, very soon.

A children's comedy show produced in 15 episodes of 25 minutes each, *Far Out Space Nuts* was clearly among the batch of light-hearted and slapstick sort of sci-fi shows that took nothing very seriously at all. The heroes of the show got themselves in a few sticky situations due to clownish misunderstandings or mere coincidence. While they were frequently captured and hindered by strange alien creatures--typically a new species in every episode--they got by using their goofy and lovable antics, and were never in any grave danger. Space-type locations and aliens were simply used as a template for verbal and physical comedy, other planets and their denizens were just a good reason for the heroes to act confused or crack more jokes. The Space Nuts' spaceship prop was based on the actual Apollo Lunar Module from the sixties.

Random trivia: Patricia Maloney, the actress in the "Honk" costume, also went on to play the little Wookie Lumpy in the infamous *Star Wars Holiday Special* in 1978.

## Jason of Star Command (1978-81)

Even though Jason of Star Command was technically a spin-off of another Saturday morning kivid show, Space Academy, there were hardly any links between the two. In this series, we followed Jason, an agent of a secret organization that operated out of a hidden section of Space Academy (thus allowing them to re-use the same exterior prop of the asteroid base), and his assorted colleagues as they fought against the evil "Master of the Cosmos" known as Dragos and his strange minions that looked like they were covered with slimy, brown seaweeds.

Dragos deserves a special mention here, as Sid Haig's portrayal of the villain was so wonderfully over-the-top that he stole the show every time he was on screen. He chewed the scenery like there was no tomorrow!

The shift from Season 1 to Season 2 brought about many alterations, including a format change (from 15-minute serial-like episodes to fill 30-minute episodes) and something of a cast shake-up. The show's feel never changed much, despite these modifications.

## Land of the Lost (1974-76)

Three members of the Marshall family - a dad called Rick along with son Will and daughter Holly - were on their inflatable raft while "on a routine expedition," as the theme song explained every time. They plummeted down a gigantic waterfall and landed in a new and mysterious universe: a savage, primordial world with three moons, full of dinosaurs, cavemen, giant plans, and ruins of buildings used by alien civilizations. It soon became clear to everyone that this wasn't Earth in a prehistoric dinosaur-filled time, but an entirely separate, closed universe. The Marshalls made their new home in a rocky cave, where they regularly had to chase away a hungry Tyrannosaurus Rex. They made friends with the ape-like Pakuni people, built what they could from plants and rocks, and had many odd adventures and discoveries, always looking for a way to return. Recurring enemies were encountered in the form of the frog-like, big-eyed Sleestaks - hostile beings armed with laughable, but cool-looking mini crossbows... and that was only the beginning.

A bizarre and captivating '70s fantasy spearheaded by Sid and Marty Krofft, *Land of the Lost* became a cult hit and had a long life in syndication and reruns, well into the 1980s and 90s. It was in fact so popular it spawned a remake with an all-new cast in 1991, and later a feature film with Will Ferrell. For its many creature scenes, the series used a combination of stop-motion animation and hand puppets. A groovy mixture, definitely!

## Logan's Run (1977-78)

Based on the 1976 film of the same name, this series was set in a post-apocalyptic future in which the citizens of the Domed City lived their lives out in a utopian fashion, being given everything they could ever want. There was a hitch, however. Every citizen would undergo an elaborate ceremony at the age of thirty, which ended in their death. Some people have managed to escape the city, despite being hunted by security officers known as the Sandmen. One Sandman, Logan, questioned the order of things and ended up escaping with the lovely Jessica. His former friend, the Sandman named Francis, dogged
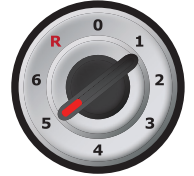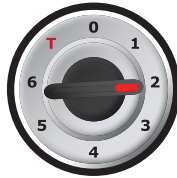
the duo's trail at every turn, as they set out to find the mysterious place known as Sanctuary. They eventually met a human-looking robot named Rem, who accompanied them on their journey. Together, they came upon various survivors of the apocalypse, each one posing a unique problem that had to be dealt with in different ways.

The special effects were extremely uneven, ranging from pretty spectacular for the time to embarrassingly bad (one robot in particular stiid out as being comically bad, as were the effects used for laser blasts). The pilot had better special effects than the rest of the series, as it borrowed heavily from the theatrical film's footage. On average, though, the series held its own decently enough with the other shows on television.

Logan's Run was initially a ratings success (allegedly, actress Heather Menzies' extremely short skirt had something to do with that), but the network constantly pre-empted the show, causing those ratings to plummet until it was cancelled after the first season.

### Planet of the Apes (1974)
This series of 14 hour-long episodes was based loosely on the series of five theatrical *Planet of the Apes* movies of the years directly preceding it (1968 through 1973), the first of which was in turn based loosely on a satirical French novel by Pierre Boulle.

In the TV version, audiences were treated to the adventures of a trio of herœs: former astronauts Alan Virdon and Peter Burke, and their very human-like chimpanzee friend Galen. The astronauts were Americans from the year 1980, and their ship had been cast through a time warp to Earth in the year 3085--or perhaps much later, since the date is debatable. Actor Roddy McDowall served as the main link between the films and the TV series, playing Galen. This did not mean reprising a role, though, as he had played two different chimpanzee characters in the movie series.

Most of the stories revolved around escaping and hiding from mortal danger, like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Logan's Run* would do a few years later: The humans, Virdon and Burke, were on the run just because they were self-determined humans in a world controlled by intelligent apes (gorillas, chimps, and orangutans); Galen was hunted for disobeying the apes' rigid laws, mainly by clinging to the belief that humans had not always been a subservient race, and it was not a natural law that the apes were in charge. On their travels, the three friends were helping out human communities and searching for ways to establish peace.

### Quark (1977-78)
In the perplexing space-faring future of 2222, planets and civilizations have organized as the United Galaxies. With the thousands of spaceships flying around, they have a garbage disposal organization tasked with picking up other spaceships' garbage loads - the pompously named United Galactic Sanitation Patrol. The titular hero of the show is actually Captain Adam Quark (played by Richard Benjamin), commanding a cruiser of said Patrol, little more than a garbage scow in space. His bossy superior Dr. Palindrome sends Quark and his colorful crew on missions that are ostensibly only about going to yet another system to pick up trash, but turn out to be rife
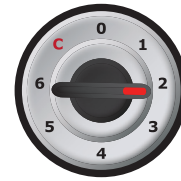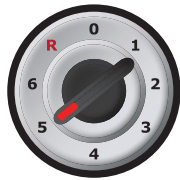
with strange occurrences--invasions, disasters, super-weapons, and interstellar crises. Just the kind of adventure Quark is really wishing for, but he always gets himself in a fix due to unbelievably bad luck.

This show was filmed and acted like a traditional 25-minute sitcom, complete with laugh tracks, double entendre one-liners and characters that were either broad stereotypes or obvious parodies of other characters from sci-fi shows and movies. It runs on a comedic "space is weird" premise popular in the late 70s, with basically all crew members beside Quark having strange sci-fi traits, clearly bordering on the ridiculous: memorable ideas included the "transmute" Gene/Jean, played by a male actor, a being who would unexpectedly switch between its male and female personalities, and the sexy twin Betties, played by identical twin actresses, allegedly an original and a clone, who never revealed which was which.
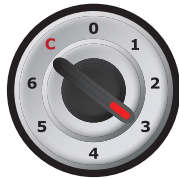
## The Six Million Dollar Man (1973-78)

Injured when his airship crashed, NASA astronaut Steve Austin underwent a surgery that effectively turned him into a cyborg, though you'd never know it by looking at him. His strength, agility and eyesight had been increased dramatically. He aligned himself with the Office of Scientific Information, acting as something of a secret agent.

One of the show's most enduring hallmarks are the "electronic" sound effects and slow-motion filming that accompanied the use of Steve Austin's enhanced powers. It was a cost-efficient way of getting the point across and became iconic, more or less by accident.

Austin came across as an everyman type of hero; honest, devoted and determined with a certain blue-collar flair. He frequently found himself up against a vast array of bad guys, ranging from cyborgs and spies to criminals and mad scientists... and even Bigfoot himself.

### The Retrostar Years

Not every series neatly began and ended in the 1970s. There was some spillover. A series that started in the 1960s might have rolled right on into the '70s, while one that began in the 1970s could have charged into the '80s.

So, what does *Retrostar* cover?

If it existed, at any point, during the disco decade, it's fair game for us to cover. If the bulk of a show existed outside of the 1970s (Dr. Who is a fine example of this), we still cover it, but will focus on those seasons that fell into our decade of choice.
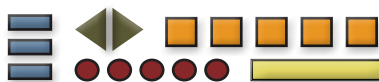
Six Million Dollar Man is a perfect example of a show set in contemporary times with relatively few overt science fiction aspects. Yes, Austin used his bionics often, but it was low key compared to other sci-fi shows of the era.

### The Secrets of Isis (1975-77)

High school science teacher Andrea Thomas finds the ancient Tutmose amulet while on an archæological dig in Egypt. She found that by exposing the amulet to the sun and saying a simple invocation ("Oh mighty Isis!"), she would transform into the very embodiment of the goddess Isis. This granted her "the powers of the animals and the elements."

The majority of her adventures revolved around using her powers to help teenagers get out of danger that inevitably arose due to their own poor decisions. Given that this was a Filmation kidvid series, there was a moral to be found in almost every story and the writers weren't afraid to bludgeon the viewer with it using all the subtlety of a jackhammer.

One distinctive feature of the show was that Isis would sometimes break the fourth wall, looking at the camera with a wry wink or addressing the viewer in other ways.

### Space: 1999 (1975-77)

When an unknown cosmic calamity caused the nuclear waste stored on the moon to explodes, the planetary satellite was knocked out of Earth's orbit and sent hurtling through space... along with the inhabitants of Moonbase Alpha! The moon effectively became an uncontrollable space vessel that gœs through a black hole and, later, through a couple of "space warps". The denizens travel through the universe, looking for a new home and encountering all manner of alien civilizations and uncanny phenomena along the way.

The two primary characters of the show were Commander John Kœnig and Dr. Helena Russell, though there was never a shortage of supporting characters involved in the stories. As was common in these series, the dynamics of the show shifted for the second season. For starters, some characters (such as Professor Bergman and Paul Morrow) disappeared, while new ones debuted (including the Psychon science officer, Maya). Additionally, the storylines became less nuanced and more action-oriented.
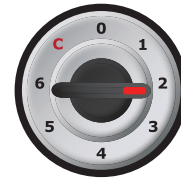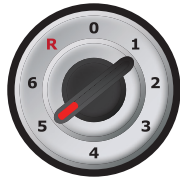
"It's better to live as your own man than as a fool in someone else's dream."
— Commander John Kœnig (*Space: 1999*)

## The Starlost (1973-74)

In the far-flung future, an enormous spaceship called "Ark" drifts uncontrolled through deep space. The crew had been killed hundreds of years ago. This ship carried 53 biospheres, which were for all intents and purposes, sealed worlds, each with its own cultures and societies. The accident that killed the crew also kept the biospheres from being able to interact. After hundreds of years, the various civilizations began to forget that they were on a ship at all.

In one such civilization, the Amish-like Cypress Corners, a man named Devon was in love with a woman named Rachel. Unfortunately, the Elders have arranged for Rachel to marry a man named Garth, despite the fact that they don't love each other. Devon learned that Cypress Corners was merely one biosphere out of many and and that the ship was on a collision course with a sun. Eventually, all three escaped, exploring the ship.

The Starlost is widely panned as being one of the worst series of all time. It deserves much of that reputation, especially in terms of the inept special effects employed after the first few episodes. However, it has a lot to offer in terms of gaming fodder, which is why it makes this list.

### Other Series

Just because a particular show didn't make the "Recommended Viewing" list, it dœsn't mean that it isn't worth checking out. There were plenty of entertaining science fiction series to be found beyond what we included in our list.

Ace of Wands (1970-72)
Bigfoot and Wildboy (1977-79)
Department S (1969-70)
Doomwatch (1970-72)
Electra Woman and Dyna Girl (1976-77)
Future Cop (1977)
Man From Atlantis (1977-78)
Moonbase 3 (1973)
Mork and Mindy (1978-82)
Salvage 1 (1979)
Sapphire and Steel (1979-82)
Space Academy (1977-79)
Star Maidens (1976)
The Bionic Woman (1976-78)
The Fantastic Journey (1977)
The Incredible Hulk (1978-82)
The Tomorrow People (1973-79)
UFO (1970-71)
Wonder Woman (1975-79)
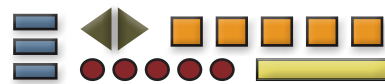
"I came from a world where the people believed that the opposite of war was peace. We found out the hard way that the opposite of war is more often slavery."

— Commander Apollo (*Battlestar Galactica*)

# The Elders Data File
## or
# How to Use This Book

The Elders have passed down these data files, and entrusted them to you.

Chapter 1 is an overview of *Retrostar*, and how and why it came to be. In the future there was science, and it was far out.

Every *Retrostar* game is a Series. Chapter 2 contains information on the components of a Series, and how to create or manage your own.

Every game needs players, and Chapter 3 discusses players and their roles in a *Retrostar* Series.

The Intention System might be a futuristic pan-democratic society, or it might be the game mechanic, overseen by the Elders of Fate, wherein players and their characters interact with the worlds around them. The Intention System is detailed in Chapter 4.

Lightswords, laser pistols, and love interests, or should it be special effects and sexy aliens? Chapter 5 breaks down SFX in a *Retrostar* Series, as well as characters of the non-player caste.

Contained within Chapter 6 is instruction on how to oversee a weekly Series on the teevee, balancing the writers room, ratings, and letting all the actors shine in their roles. Or, if you're in a bind, and your friends are dropping by with pizza, Tab soda, and Billy beer, and you have to run an episode of *Retrostar*, how to do so on the fly, and your players will get to have their moments too!

This is episodic television, and episodic television has rules!  The 5-Act Structure and the 60-minute program are covered in detail in Chapter 7.

Assembled across multiple realities is Chapter 8, recounting exemplar Series, so that those that follow the Elders may learn from them; or a full lineup of prime-time programming with example Series.

An actual transmission of the Intention System is transcribed in Chapter 9.

Chapter 10 is how *Retrostar* came to be, and how to fill your own space adventures with disco balls.

The 1st appendix contains notes meant only for Showrunners, in relation to the exemplar Series in the 8th Chapter.

The 2nd appendix catalogs and summarizes the most salient universal truths, for easy reference.

Each sci-fi TV series of the 1970s had its own premise, formula, tone and cast of characters that made it unique. No two shows were the same, even if some of them did share certain elements with one another. The same goes for Series in *Retrostar*.

The Series forms the foundation of your games, setting the stage for all the action, adventure and drama to come. It gives you everything you and your group will need to blast off into the cosmos or anywhere else, for that matter.

Before you can play *Retrostar,* you'll need to select a pre-made Series (see pages 68-93) or create your own. This chapter will give you instructions and advice for doing the latter.

## STEP 1: THE PITCH

Think of this as an elevator pitch, a quick synopsis of what your Series is all about. It establishes the situation, possibly gives a bit of the background and paints who the central characters are in very broad strokes.

Come up with a pitch for your Series. Make it cheesy, make it compelling, but think in terms of episodic television. Every week, some of the same type of stuff will happen, but how much will the overall plot move forward (if there is an overall plot at all)?

Here's a selection of examples:

**Galactic Run:** *Cannonball Run* meets *Smokey and the Bandit* meets *Convoy* in Space. PCs are space truckers, fighting against a very oppressive government who wants to crack down on their transport. Why? Because Runners frequently move product that is outside the law. Additionally, there is a big ol' scary sector of space that the government is very afraid of (think China in the early 1970s).

**Battleground: Homefront:** The characters are clones. While their original form lives the high-life aboard the space station far above the polluted earth, their clones fight a Vietnam-like war down on earth. It's a very dark Series. Life aboard the space station is very '70s (discos, soft lighting, etc.). The characters are the upper-class *because* they have allowed themselves to be cloned. Their clones, however are disposable grunts. The big question here is: Will the clones revolt? Dark, dark things will happen, secrets will be uncovered.

**Family Nuclear:** After a horrific accident, a single father is given a choice: watch his daughter die before being dying himself or live and serve a shadowy government organization in their fight against international terrorists! Father and daughter have cybernetics and must now travel the globe, fighting a war no one knows is being waged. 1970s single-parent family dynamics – single dad trying to woo women, teenage rebellion, action, exotic locales!

**ARC93:** After the global war, there were many dead on all sides, and still no fuel. The Advanced Rescue Craft, a mobile city, powered by the sun, travels the world, seeking to rescue those who want to restart society. But, no society is perfect. Rollerskating, post-apocalyptic type vistas, each Episode brings a new town, and new problems, lots of family dynamics inside the city.
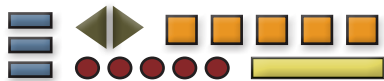
**Space Rejects:** Everybody loves a good underdog story and if there ever was an underdog story, this would be it. After the deaths of the famous and illustrious heroes of the Terra Defense Force at the hands of alien invaders, the outcasts, slackers and rebels find themselves positioned as humanity's last chance for survival.

## STEP 2: THE SUMMARY

With the overall premise established, you can now write up the Series summary. More detailed than the pitch, the summary will likely be half of a page or more, going into specific details of the Series. You might even consider a short introduction to the Series (think voice-over at the start of the first Episode).

Fortunately, much of the legwork will have already been done during Step One. All you'll need to do now is expand upon it. In the summary, you'll need to hit the following points.

**Setting:** When and where will the Series take place? Will it be in outer space or on a spaceship/station? Will it be in a post-apocalyptic wasteland? A prehistoric jungle? The modern world of the 1970s? Or perhaps in an Earth city in the near future? It's entirely possible to have more than one setting in a Series (e.g., aboard a naval vessel and in an aquatic city deep below the waves).

**Background:** What made the setting the way it is at the beginning of the Series? What events shaped the state of things? Did aliens betray us by destroying our colonies? Was someone from another time discovered? Was a severely injured astronaut rebuilt as a cyborg? The idea is to determine the general history of the Series and what the catalyst was that triggered the beginning of the Series.

**Protagonists:** Who are the heroes of the Series? Are they members of a benevolent organization? Space smugglers? Experimental super soldiers? Scientists looking for breakthroughs in other galaxies? Time travelers? Members of a rebellion? This gives the players a starting point when it comes time for them to create their characters, though you should allow them the freedom to come up with character concepts that break the general mold a little.

**Opposition:** Who or what (if anything) will provide the heroes with the bulk of their challenges during the Series? An evil organization or empire? A tyrannical despot? An army of robots? A governing body? Nature itself? It could be that the Series doesn't have a main source of opposition. If that's the case, it should be alluded to in the summary. For example, if the heroes are traveling from planet to planet in unexplored sectors of space, the opposition could very well be different from Episode to Episode.

## STEP 3: THE DIALS

Every Series has many different facets, from its tone to its budget. In order to recreate that fact in *Retrostar*, we have included Dials.

There are five Dials: Thematic, Plot, Recurring, Cheese and SFX. They are rated from 0 to 6. The higher the number in a Dial, the more likely it will be showcased in a given Episode. A rating of 0 indicates that the Dials won't be a factor in Episodes at all.

These Dials have a very specific game effect for a Showrunner creating Episodes of the Series. A Dial of 0 dœs not mean that at the season finale, there will not be some series-changing development. The Dials serve as a tool for the Showrunner to create Episodes, but the Showrunner of course has final say in what gœs into an episode. Think of the Dials as prompts, but do not ignore them.

In addition to the number, you should jot down ideas to draw from when defining each Episode. Having these ideas on paper will be of great assistance when it comes time to whip up an Episode.

### Thematic
This measures how often the Series implements various themes and social commentary. Some ideas include a Vietnam War analogue, counter-culture, the fuel crisis, governmental scandal, divorce, racism, women's lib, Equal Rights Amendment, etc.

Science fiction, as a genre, frequently examines society, and asks us to look at ourselves through the lens of a fantastic, fictional future.

Dœs your series offer up social commentary, be it biting or blatant?

The 1970s were very socially charged, and sci-fi of the era frequently reflected this.

### Plot
Plot is the overall plot of a Series. Some Series have a definitive plot that moves the overall story forward; other Series establish a premise and each Episode is just a variant on that premise. Showrunners should keep this plot information to themselves, and notate the order in which plot elements will appear. Chapter 10 details the Plots of the sample Series, and this chapter is for the eyes of the Showrunner only. As a Series is broadcast, Plot elements come into play subtly, or obviously, and not every Episode needs to be focused on the overarching plot.

A Plot of 0 would indicate that every episode of your series wiped the slate clean, and there was no change or movement with any characters or situations.

A Plot of 6 is a series where every episode moves the story forward, and characters and situations are changed.

### Recurring
This deals with elements that happen repeatedly in some way or another. Some ideas include starship battles, council meetings, rescues, chase sequences, mission debriefings, etc.

Many TV shows, are, by nature, formulaic. This familiarity makes viewers comfortable, and gives them something to look forward to. How formulaic is your series, or dœs it buck this trend, and offer up a more complicated and challenging viewing experience?

### Cheese
This covers anything hokey, silly or fad-oriented. If it's something that will assuredly make viewers groan and shake their heads when viewing the show thirty or forty years down the road, it belongs here. Some ideas include disco, roller-skating, "far-out" hippies, overly sentimental scenes, CB technology, etc.

The Tucana Sisters (in BSG) were a perfect example of this. And if you do not know who they are, get searching!

## SFX

This reflects special effects and big set pieces that would not be stock footage; stuff above and beyond the scope of a normal Episode and the usual sets. Some ideas include massive asteroid fields, an alien palace, gargantuan space dragons, special laser cannon blasts, earthquakes, etc.

> "All that commotion about good and evil - whatever they are. I thank my lucky stars I have a cluster of electronic chips instead of a conscience... saves all that soul-searching."
>
> — Rem (*Logan's Run*)

### What the Dials Do
Each Dial's number will have a direct impact on the PCs.

### Thematic, Plot, Recurring and Cheese
As the players become accustomed to their PCs during the Series, they can assign an individual character detail to each of the Dials. There is space for this on the character sheets. For example, a Thematic detail might be that the character is veteran of a Vietnam War analogue... or a Recurring detail might be that character has a catchphrase or a specific token item that makes an appearance from time to time.

At the start of every Episode, each player chooses one of their PC's Dial details and rolls a d6. If the die result is equal to or less than the Dial's number, the character detail will be brought into play in some fashion during that Episode. Sometimes, these details will grant bonus dice; other times, they will help drive the focus of an Episode.

### SFX
SFX is different than the other Dials. Players don't write a detail in the appropriate space on the character sheet. Don't be mistaken, though. It still affects PCs... just in a different way. The SFX number determines the SFX Pool available to the players for each Episode. The number in this Dial will tell you how many SFX points the character has in their Pool.

## STEP 4: THE DETAILS

All the pieces of the puzzle should be in place by this point. We know what's going on, what the Series is about, who the heroes are and who will provide the villainy. During this step, you'll need to flesh it all out and get into the specifics.

Step Four is actually composed of several sub-steps, each of which are discussed below:

### Sub-Step A: Significant Showrunner Characters
Start making a list of SCs that will make regular appearances in the Series and statting them up (both with full stats and Xd assignations). It might also be helpful to write a short 1-3 sentence blurb about each SC; kind of a nutshell of the role they play within the Series. These stats will not be shared with the players, but all the other details should be.

**EXAMPLE LIST**
*(see Battleground: Homefront series, pages 70-73 for more details)*

- ***President Hecate (3d):*** Leader of humanity aboard the space station.
- ***Dr. Rose (3d):*** Scientist responsible for cloning technology.
- ***Captain Gaines (2d):*** Commanding officer of the PCs.
- ***Cros (1d):*** Insurgents based on Earth.
- ***Cro Leaders (2d):*** Insurgent leaders.

## Sub-Step B: Common SFX

In this sub-step, you'll need to list a handful of SFX that are used quite a lot throughout the Series. Each SFX should also be given a base die value, reflecting its overall effectiveness.

### Characters with SFX

SFX that are assigned to individual characters, or revealed in an Episode, will have a value, and that dice value will be 1 higher. Think of specific character-related SFX as that character's established signature abilities, moves, or gadgets. If you spend but 1 SFX Point on one of them, it will work as a bonus of +2 dice.
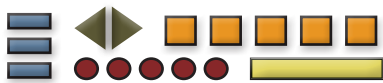
## Sub-Step C: Style

Style is a loose category where you can record some of the aspects that help make the Series distinctive; things such as the look and feel of the Series, the fashions and hairstyles that the setting's denizens wear (including uniforms, as appropriate), terminology that people use and so forth. Visual aids can be very helpful if you're inclined to draw or find applicable images online.

## Sub-Step D: Terminology

As discussed in Chapter 1, renaming was common in sci-fi, additionally, there will likely be terminology used by the characters in the show that should be known to everyone.

### STEP 5: THE CHARACTERS

Character creation for *Retrostar* is really a joint effort between the Showrunner and the players.

The Showrunner creates the roles for the Series, after all, only the Showrunner knows what roles need to be filled.

Embracing the TV Guide æsthetic, the players are responsible for casting these roles.

Just as a Series Pitch is short, so is a character's Background. It will establish most of what a character is in relation to the Series, but players will be allowed the creative freedom to customize their characters, both when they create them, through casting and the assignation and definition of their Traits and Descriptors, but also through play, as the PCs will help to define the Series, and their characters.

This is akin to a method acting approach: There is the script, but the actors (in this case, the players) are given the freedom to bring more to the screen than just what is on the written page. Players will define their characters' catchphrases, they will be given the power to explore aspects of the Series that develop through extended play, and they might even be able to bring some exciting new SFX to the table.

Much of this will be covered in more detail in the Character Creation Chapter, but for now, we will focus on the responsibilities of the Showrunner.

The Showrunner has created a Series, now they need characters to star in their Series.

Each character will have a Background. This Background can be no more than 50 words on the character sheet, and should convey all the most significant information about the character. It does not need to be written using proper sentences, as the word count is very important. *(If you prefer to write it in full grammatical sentences, or even colorful prose, you can use that method as well.)* These Background details will be one of the ways that players can take the spotlight in a given Scene or Episode. As a Series progresses and moves into a second, third, or fourth season, these Backgrounds may change somewhat. A player playing a crack starfighter pilot who is also a single dad in season 1 may find that the "single dad aspect" of their character is just not as significant in season 2. These season-to-season changes will also be illustrated  in the *Battlefield: Homefront* Series (see pages 70-73 and pages 116-118).

As much as there is a tendency towards verbosity, just stick within the 50-word limit. Sparseness is your friend. Imagine being a television producer and dealing with actors, all of whom want to bring something of themselves to the role, so by defining a character through the Background, we are also giving a great deal of artistic freedom to the players with their characters.

So, detail the most significant parts of a character: What is their niche? Do they have a particularly strong relationship with any of the other characters? What is their backstory?

And keep it all at 50 words.

## SFX

The SFX that a character has access to are initially defined by the Showrunner. Some characters may be assigned very specific SFX, and in some Series, characters might be allowed to choose.

Why? Because the SFX were a significant part of the budget and needed to remain consistent with the Series, because they were a focal point. As a Series progresses, characters might want to acquire, or be given, new SFX (see pages 55-55).

Examples of characters being given an option would be a combat-heavy Series, where the characters are allowed to choose between:

- Laser Pistol 1/ +2d
- Heavy Rifle 2/ +3d
- Rocket Boots 2/ +3d
- Computer Interface 1/ +2d

Other Series might be much more strictly defined, two psychic characters might have very different abilities, one character might have:

- Psionic Blast 1/ +2d
- Aura Reading 1/ +2d

While another might have:

- Second Sight 2/ +3d

Additionally, SFX can also be awesome karate moves, or even a character changing into a special costume (or changing out of something, if it was looking for that sexy appeal). Think of SFX as the cool things a character did once or twice an Episode, and when they did it, the viewers made sure to focus their attention.

## DONE?

Do you have an idea what your Series is about? Series creation is meant to be front-loaded work for a Showrunner, so that once a Series is created, the players can sit down and play (character creation on the players' side of things should hopefully not take too long). Prep for an Episode can be done beforehand, or the Showrunner can show up and wing it.

This was a design goal of *Retrostar*, so that it could almost be what is called a "beer and pretzels" roleplaying game. Yes, some Episodes the Showrunner might want to put more thought into, but once the Showrunner and players get into the groove of things, fun can had with minimal notice!

# The Players and Their Characters

The sci-fi television shows of the groove-a-licious 1970s were largely driven by the main characters. From the scoundrel pilot and the time-tossed astronaut to the bionic secret agent and the commander of a moon-base that was knocked out of orbit. Every story has to have protagonists, a fact that is even truer with heroic fiction of this nature.

That's where the players come in!

They create these protagonists (with guidelines from the Showrunner) and portray them during the game, just as actors portrayed the herœs on those shows from yesteryear. As mentioned earlier in this rulebook, the primary characters of the show are called Player Characters (often abbreviated to PCs).

In this chapter, we will teach you how to create Player Characters to star in the series!

Ready. Set. Go!

## BACKGROUND

This is a concise description of the character's role within the series. Think of this as the show producer's notes on each character.

*Macho yet sensitive, outlaw spirit, tough guy, very anti-authority, honorable and loyal to his friends and all the runners, always sticks up for the little guy. Veteran of the war, but would rather not talk about. Has a way with the ladies, and definitive charm, roguish glint in his eye.*

The background of a character is created by the Showrunner, which gives players a basis from which to work as they construct their characters. This is a drastic departure from how things are normally done in roleplaying games, but it stays true to how the shows were created. After all, the actors didn't devise the character concepts—they simply added their own personal touch to what the writers established. In *Retrostar*, you have more freedom than the actors did, but the core character idea is still the province of the Showrunner.

The players each select a character from the "Casting" section of the Series Bible and flesh them out, customizing them and making them their own.

## CASTING

This is a description of the "actor" portraying the character. In many TV series, this was as significant as their Background, and is the stuff cover photographs of weekly television periodicals were made of.

Is the character played by teen-magazine cover boy? A silver screen veteran? What do they look like?

The initial player responsibility is to cast the character (i.e., describe what they look like) and it can be as descriptive, specific, and meta as you like.

A player gets up to 25 words for casting... and should therefore choose those words carefully. Casting needn't be given in full sentences. But know that "feathered, sandy brown hair" is a fine use of 4 of those 25 words.

Why? Because in an episode, if the camera focuses on your "feathered, sandy brown hair" you will get a bonus. Yes, this is a meta approach, but it was also appropriate for the time. That awesome hairdo might get you on the cover of a weekly TV periodical. It is why people tune in.

Example Casting: exotic, sexy, gravelly voice, roguish smile, former NFL player, pop singer, teen idol.
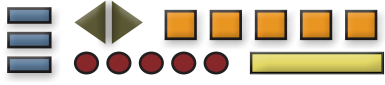
### Meta?
Throughout the text, you'll encounter the term "meta" from time to time. The term indicates something that is self-referential; that is, it refers to itself or the conventions and tropes of the genre.

### Gender
As much as *Retrostar* is designed to emulate 1970's sci-fi, it also embraces some of the surprising choices players can make by putting the players in the role of actors, actors who are expected to bring all sorts of Method to the gaming table.

With this said, Backgrounds are often written with a specific gender in mind, but if a player decides to forsake this with their casting, they should be encouraged to do so, and it should be easy enough to alter the Background text.

## TRAITS

In the science fiction TV shows of the 1970s, every character had strengths and weaknesses. Some were bold, adventurous types who leapt into action when the need arose, while some preferred to use their brains to solve the problems that inevitably came up; still others handled matters with charm, guile or even outright manipulation.

In *Retrostar*, characters' fortés—and whatever the opposite of fortés might be—are measured by three stats called Traits. They are Adventure, Thought and Drama. Let's look at them in more detail.

### Adventure
Adventure is a measure of how suited the character is for action, especially the physical aspects of it. Tasks that would require the use of Adventure:

• Running from a group of enemies
• Sneaking up on a guard
• Duking it out with hostile aliens
• Climbing up the side of a cliff
• Shooting a large creature with a laser gun
• Piloting a Starfighter through an asteroid field
• Leaping across a gaping chasm

### Thought
Thought is a measure of the character's intelligence, perception and resourcefulness. Tasks that would require the use of Thought:

• Detecting an enemy ambush before it is sprung
• Fixing a busted hyperdrive
• Devising a strategy to thwart the enemy
• Analyzing a chemical to determine what it is
• Rerouting the power in a space station
• Deciphering an enemy's code
• Remembering a little-known fact

### Drama
Drama is a measure of the character's personality, charisma and strength of will. Tasks that would require the use of Drama:

• Persuading a space pirate that you don't have any valuable cargo hidden on your ship
• Seducing a high-ranking official
• Using intimidation to get a captured henchman to give up information
• Bargaining with a merchant to get a good deal
• Participating in a disco-dancing competition
• Suckering a primitive alien race into believing you're a deity
• Resisting any of the above

*Retrostar* is not interested in every step of a character solving a problem, or overcoming an obstacle; the character has the spotlight... now act. Do you approach that problem because you are adventurous? Thoughtful? Dramatic? Sometimes a Showrunner will be very specific in how a problem is to be approached. Other times, a player might have flexibility. Details about how Traits are used can be found in Chapter 4, see pages 43-47).

Players must distribute the following array of numbers: 1, 0, -1 to the three Traits.

They will then add 1 to any of the Traits. For those confused, this means the possible values for Traits are:

> **Option A:** 2, 0, -1;
> **Option B:** 1, 1, -1;
> **Option C:** 1, 0, 0

• A value of -1 indicates that the character is underdeveloped in that Trait.
• A value of 0 establishes the character as more or less average in that Trait.
• A value of 1 illustrates that the character is very gifted or well-trained in that Trait.
• A value of 2 expresses that the character is a master or expert in that Trait.

## DESCRIPTORS

Traits paint a view of the character's capabilities in broad strokes, giving a generalized view of what they can do. Descriptors allow us to focus in on the specifics.

For any Trait that has a non-zero value, the player gets to add one or more Descriptors. They receive one Descriptor for a Trait of 1 or -1 and two Descriptors for a Trait value of 2.

Descriptors are yet another resource a player can call upon to gain extra dice to add to a roll. Although negative Trait values subtract dice from a roll, a Descriptor can add dice.

The reason is simple.

Descriptors are even more definition of a character. The delineation between a Descriptor and Casting is not explicitly stated. So a character might have a "roguish smile" in their Casting, or under Drama.

And a character with an Adventure of -1 is "klutzy". Any time their klutziness comes into play in a series, it gives them an advantage, as it is something for which they are known. This gives the player a dice advantage. Having a negative value in a Trait is not a good thing, but the Descriptor can make it so.

So, the brainy kid with an Adventure of -1? The audience knows he's not very good at feats requiring physical prowess. Yet when his slight frame is emphasized, the camera focuses in on this, and the player gets a bonus.

A Trait of 0 has no dice bonus or penalty attached, so they have no Descriptor. They are very vanilla in regards to this Trait.

## DIALS

Player Characters also have Dials. These will not be defined at the start of a Series. Rather, these will be defined by the player as the series progresses. Players will have the ability to define a character's Thematic, Plot, Recurring, and Cheese Dials. A player dœsn't have to, and a specific character might have multiple facets of a specific Dial. These are the character-specific facets that develop as a series dœs. Perhaps a player reveals that a character comes from a gender-oppressed society (Thematic), or that a significant part of the Plot has directly involved or affected them, or a character has a catchphrase or mannerism they like to incorporate every episode (Recurring) and some characters are just dated clichés, even at the time (Cheese). There will be more specific examples of this in Chapter 6, but a starting character be-

gins the series with a clean slate! A player should allow a character to define these Dials through play; they might even be surprised... just as a viewer would. *"Who knew that the gruff admiral of the interstellar fleet played the sitar (Cheese)?"*

DONE.

With the character's Casting, Traits and Descriptors defined, the character is ready for the series' pilot episode!

**Character Name:**

**Player:**

**Series Name:**

Series Dials: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Thematic  Plot  Recurring  Cheese  SFX

**Background:**

**RETROSTAR**

ADVENTURE

THOUGHT

DRAMA

**Casting:**

Thematic

Plot

Recurring

Cheese

SFX

### How Many Dice Do I Roll and What Do I Keep?

| -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **3 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **2 dice** (add together the two results) | **3 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) | **4 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) |

This table is open-ended in both directions. Simply keep adding an extra die to the roll and keep the two lowest results or highest results, whichever is appropriate.

### Intention Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: Fail and maintain control of their character **OR** Succeed and cede control of their character. |
| 10+ | The character succeeds. |

SFX Pool:

*Retrostar* uses the *Intention System*. The Intention System is designed to empower players, and make every action a player takes a dramatic moment. As implemented in *Retrostar*, the Intention System has been designed to replicate the pacing of a 70s sci-fi television series, as well as being able to handle multiple series leads. At its heart, the Intention System is about what a character wants to do. The foundation for it comes from acting classes, where a student would be asked, "What are you trying to do to the other actor?" This stands as the basis for every actor-to-actor interaction. The Intention System often dœs not break down an Intent into multiple actions or "moves." Characters want to do big things and the rules facilitate this. A character is in combat: They are not trying to attack one character, they are attempting to stay alive (and look cool doing so, we hope). Is every roll of the dice just one action, or is it multiple actions? There is no hard-and-fast rule, but we are going to attempt to explain the system, and how a Showrunner can work with the players for the enjoyment of all.

## ADVENTURE! THOUGHT! DRAMA!

These three Traits are the basis of the Intention System. Characters will attempt adventurous (physical) actions, thoughtful actions, and dramatic (interpersonal) actions. As in real life, we are not concerned with the nitty-gritty specifics of a character's "stats." In another system, one pilot might have a Strength of 12, another might have a Strength of 13. Dœs that really matter? In *Retrostar*, characters are more defined as poor (-1), average (0), good (+1) and, in rare occasions, outstanding (+2) in these three Traits.

These Traits determine how they interact with the world around them. Further, Traits that are not average have one or more Descriptors attached, giving a more complete picture of the character... so while two characters both might have an Adventure of 1, one character might be Strong, while another might be Daring.

## INTENTS AND INTENTIONS

Every attempt by a character to do something is called an Intent.

**Showrunner:** "As you make you way across the hangar bay, two enemy soldiers appear and open fire on you."

**Player:** "I sprint for my starfighter, taking a shot with my blaster, hoping to give myself some form of cover."

The player's Intent is to get into their Starfighter, all the while avoiding enemy fire.

This is one Intent.

**Player:** "I want to try and override the security system."

If the Showrunner describes hidden lasers firing at the character as part of the security system, this is still the same Intent.

**Player:** "I am going to pick up the alien infant and run away from the enemy vehicle, attempting to leap across the chasm, in the hopes that they won't be able to pursue me."

This is one Intent.

**Player:** "I am going to try and talk to the Senator, in the hopes that he will allow us passage."

(Hopefully, in this last situation, the player would not necessarily declare this, but would also seize the opportunity to roleplay).

This is an Intent.

An Intent is not just one action, although it *can* be. More often, the Intent is the sequence of actions leading to one result.

*Retrostar* is a game designed to emulate 1970s sci-fi and because of this, the game mechanics of the Intention System differ from the norm.

Think about your favorite 1970s sci-fi, what you see on screen. Are we focused on every task a character attempts? Dœs the camera pause and allow us to focus on a character dodging? Dœs it then pause and allow us to focus on a character running? Leaping? Instead of actions being broken down into multiple steps, *Retrostar* looks at the Intent. What is the player trying to do? Instead of breaking this down into multiple steps and multiple dice rolls, it is likely to be one roll of the dice. Yes, this makes success or failure that much more dramatic, and reliant upon just one roll, but as you continue reading, you will discover that success and failure are all relative.

## UNDERSTANDING INTENTIONS

Let's use a quick example to help drive home how it all works.

**Showrunner:** "What are you trying to do?"

**Player A:** "I want to shoot one of the soldiers."

**Showrunner:** "No, what are you trying to do? I understand that you are trying to shoot one of the soldiers. I understand that you are actively dodging their fire. What is your goal in this Scene? The guards have found you. They are going to try and shoot you, they might call in other guards, they might alert the whole ship they have found you. So, what do you want to do?"

**Player A:** "Ummm... to not get hit."

**Showrunner:** "Yes, that is true. You were attempting to find your way to the ship's reactor room. I decided to throw a wrinkle in your plans by stating that you have stumbled across some guards; they easily determine that you are the opponents they are looking for. You want to not get hit, you want to fire back. Those are cool things to do."

**Player B:** "Well, we want to make sure they don't alert any other guards or anyone else on the ship. Maybe one of us can find another way or some sort of trapdoor, a way to escape. Our goal here is to not get caught and to get to the reactor."

**Showrunner:** "That dœs indeed sound like your goal."

**Player B:** "Okay, so maybe while you (indicating Player A) can try and take some of these goons out, I can try and find a secret door or something, to get them off our trail."

**Player A:** "I'm going to try and keep the guards busy, firing back and making sure none get away to warn any others."

And now, the Showrunner knows what is going on. Player A might have an Adventure Intent, Player B might have a Thought Intent. They can each play to their strengths, but the obstacles for both likely remain the same (i.e. enemies firing at them!).

This Scene will not be resolved with a dice roll for each enemy firing their blaster, Player A firing their blaster, and Player B attempting to find a trap door that maybe the Showrunner had not planned on. Instead, Player A will roll once, and Player B will roll once.

This will be the first flurry of activity in the Scene. Player B may find a trapdoor, but will need Player A to smash it open. This might be a second roll of Player A, but they are still opposed by the enemies.

The Showrunner sets up a Scene and the players react to it. Scenes can go off in odd directions; this was a design goal. The players can influence their surroundings as well.

An Intent might be just one focused action (disarming a bomb), but even this Intent might well be affected by what is happening around the character. But, other Intents are likely to be a culmination of several actions.

There are times, of course, when a character is unable to play to their strengths and these moments are as significant in a *Retrostar* Episode. When the Showrunner determines that a character must use Adventure, Thought or Drama in a specific Scene. If the characters are all trying to talk their way past the guards, their Intents might all be Drama-based, there is just no way around it.

The Intention System helps facilitate player-driven Intentions because the Player Characters are the ones acting and reacting. During the course of an Episode, it is very likely that a Showrunner will not roll any dice. The Showrunner's responsibility is to put the Player Characters into situations that they must respond to. Everything in a particular Scene is there for the Player Characters and it might be a *Benefit* or it might be an *Obstacle*.

Player Characters will interact with Showrunner Characters (SCs), but these SCs will more often than not be defined by their significance in the story. Although the corrupt emperor appears physically weak, players will not be able to exploit his infirm state. His frail physical state does not make him any less of a threat. Why? Because exploiting the weakness of an SC in this way is not the stuff of which great stories are told. The emperor is a threat in spite of his frail state. This makes him even more terrifying. Players might decide to go after him with an Adventure Intent—that is their right—and they should be encouraged to do so, but they will not gain an additional advantage. The emperor is a threat no matter what. That is the stuff great stories are made of.

The Intention System is not an adversarial system. The Showrunner is not tasked with defeating the Player Characters. This is not what 1970s sci-fi was about. PCs might indeed face setbacks, and may very well fail, but this is what makes for an interesting story... and interesting stories are what the Intention System is about.

## ROLLING THE DICE

When making an Intent, you'll roll a certain number of dice, take two of the results and add them together. The higher, the better.

The Trait being used determines the number of core dice you roll and how many you keep. A rating of -1 means that you roll 3 dice and add together the lowest two results. A rating of 0, means that you roll 2 dice and add both together. A rating of +1 means that you roll 3 dice and add together the highest two results. A rating of +2 means that you roll 4 dice and add together the highest two results.

The number of dice rolled can be modified by Obstacles and Benefits, as well as by SFX.

## OBSTACLES AND BENEFITS

**Showrunner:** "As you make your way across the hangar bay, two enemy soldiers appear, and open fire on you."

**Player:** "I sprint for my starfighter, taking a shot with my blaster, hoping to give myself some form of cover."

The Showrunner will then determine how many Obstacles stand between the character and their goal.

An Obstacle is anything opposing the player, be it a Showrunner Character (SC), a hi-tech computer, a chasm to leap over, a crowd of people not sympathetic to the character's cause – these are all Obstacles. When all the Obstacles are determined, the Showrunner will tally them all up, and announce them to the player.

The Showrunner declares that the soldiers are run-of-the-mill opponents (0d), there are 2 of them (+1d), they are firing their Blasters (1/ +2d, the Showrunner will remove 1 SFX point from their pool; if the Showrunner wanted, because there are two of them, they could spend 2 SFX points for a total of +4d, but this would be very mean), so the Obstacles total: 0d+1d+2d= 3d. The player will then determine their Benefits: Traits, SFX, and Spotlight Tokens are common examples of Benefits.

The character has an Adventure value of 1, and is using their Blaster (1/+2d, spending one point from their SFX pool). This gives the player a Benefit of 1+2d= 3d.

Once Obstacles and Benefits have been determined, compare these two numbers. Obstacles are negative, Benefits are positive. In this case, Obstacles = -3d, Benefits = +3d, the two cancel each other out.

The player has stated their Intent and knows how difficult it will be. How do they act?

Obstacles and Benefits give positive and negative dice to a roll, but a Player always rolls at least 2 dice. These are six-sided dice. A player will roll more dice if the Obstacles and Benefits

## Spotlight Tokens

Spotlight Tokens are a resource the players have access to, allowing them to go above and beyond Adventure, Thought and Drama. Perhaps they have some groovy feathered hair, a lifelong friendship with another character, or even are a teen heart-throb. Spotlight Tokens are those moments when one character is in the spotlight, What you need to know now is that Spotlight Tokens give players a one-time +2d Benefit. Spotlight Tokens will be fully covered and explained in Chapter 6 (see pages 58-61).

total is positive or negative. Using the above example, if the player had used a Spotlight Token, too, this would have given them an additional Benefit of +2d, so their total would have been +2d. The player would roll 4 dice.

No matter how many dice are rolled, only 2 dice are added together. If the dice added to a roll are negative, the player will add together the value of the 2 dice that rolled the lowest. If the dice added to a roll are positive, the player will add the value of the 2 dice that rolled the highest.

Positive dice added to roll: player totals the 2 highest dice rolled.

Negative dice added to roll: player totals the 2 lowest dice rolled.

| How Many Dice Do I Roll and What Do I Keep? | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 |
| 6 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 5 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 4 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 3 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 2 dice (add together the two results) | 3 dice (add together the 2 highest results) | 4 dice (add together the 2 highest results) | 5 dice (add together the 2 highest results) | 6 dice (add together the 2 highest results) |

This table is open-ended in both directions. Simply keep adding an extra die to the roll and keep the two lowest results or highest results, whichever is appropriate.

How about 3 examples, all riffing off the example above?

### Example 1

As written, the Obstacles and Benefits total 0, so the player rolls two dice.
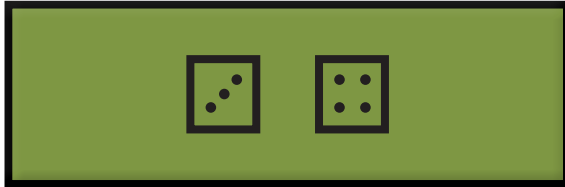
The dice come up 4 and 3. The player adds them for a total of 7.

### Example 2

For this example, the Showrunner describes the Scene as: "As you make your way across the hangar bay, two enemy soldiers appear, and open fire on you. One of them begins retracting the loading platform, so you will likely have to jump across to reach your ship."

The Showrunner determines this jump will not be that difficult, but will be an additional Obstacle of +1d.

So, the Obstacle total is 4d, and the player's Benefit is only 3d, so the total is 3d - 4d = -1d.

The player will now roll 3 dice, and add the value of the 2 lowest dice.

The player rolls a 1, 4, 6. The player adds the 1 and 4 for a total of 5.

### Example 3

The Showrunner's setup is the same as in Example 1, for an Obstacle total of 3d. The player is going to spend a Spotlight Token to add an additional +2d Benefit to their total. Obsta-

cle 3d, Benefit 5d. 5d-3d = +2d. The player will add 2 dice to their roll, rolling 4 dice and add the value of the 2 highest dice.
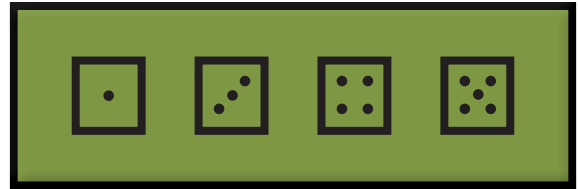
The player rolls 1, 3, 4, 5, so their total is 4+5 = 9.

## INTERPRETING INTENTION

A player now has a total. What does it mean?

This answer is both simple and complicated. The table below gives us the simple part of the equation.

### Intention Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: *Fail and maintain control of their character* **OR** *Succeed and cede control of their character.* |
| 10+ | The character succeeds. |

Now, let us define some terms, and more, let us talk more about the Intention System.

Fail: The character does not succeed at their task. More significantly, the Showrunner determines what this means, keeping in mind this is episodic television, and the PCs are the stars of the show; they don't die, they don't get too seriously wounded. Instead of thinking in terms of harming a PC, think in terms of control of that character. This is the Intention System.

A character wants to accomplish something. They fail. What does this failure mean? The

answer to this question is: What makes sense in the story, and more, what is interesting and unexpected?

When a character sets out to accomplish something, they likely know what success means, but they (and we the audience) do not know what it means if they fail. We might have an idea of what it could mean, but like life, it is rarely black and white. We, as people, do not know what the repercussions of failure will be, and neither should the players or their characters. This is dangerous. This is scary. Players (and their characters) should be a bit scared. This makes for effective storytelling.

The Intention System manages to keep every action dangerous through the unapologetic abuse of the PCs.

Wait, what?

When a character attempts an action, the worst thing that might happen is out of their control.

What this means is that a player has no say about what happens to their character.

Control of a character... this is the result of an Intent.

Fail: The character does not succeed at their task. But what happens because of this failure? We should examine the scenario presented above:

**Showrunner:** "As you make your way across the hangar bay, two enemy soldiers appear, and open fire on you."

**Player:** "I sprint for my starfighter, taking a shot with my blaster, hoping to give myself some form of cover."

Failure in this situation might mean that the character is hit and the screen goes black.

The player will have no idea what happened.

They will want to know. The Showrunner has the character now.

When will we see the character again? Are they alive? Are they dead?

In this situation, the Showrunner determines that the character will be captured and brought before the admiral of the ship. But, the Showrunner does not have to declare this immediately.

So, the question a Showrunner has to ask themselves is: What happens if a character fails a specific action? What are the consequences? But, as part of the question, the Showrunner's job is to keep the story moving forward, and to acknowledge that the PCs are the stars of the show.

The Showrunner is encouraged to "hurt" the PCs by putting them in situations they will not be comfortable with. At heart, though, the Showrunner wants the PCs to succeed, but is also responsible for ratings. It isn't worthy of Saturday night prime time to watch a show about characters who succeed all the time. True heroes struggle dramatically before they finally succeed!

## Fail
The character fails. The Showrunner decides what this means.

## Fail and Maintain Control
The character fails, but the player is able to maintain control of their character. In the above scenario, the character fails to reach their ship (that was their Intent). This does not mean they just get to try again. That does not make for good television.

Instead, the Showrunner declares that one of the soldier's blasts hits the ship and the ship is destroyed. The character has failed, because the ship is no longer functional. What will the character do now? The player is now presented with a new situation and must respond and react.

## Succeed and Lose Control

The Intent was a success, but at what cost? In the above scenario, the character reaches their ship. The Showrunner, not being a jerk, understands that this Intent was to reach the ship and escape (obviously!), so the character has succeeded. The starfighter exits the hangar, the character has succeeded! Yay! But something didn't go just right. Cut to commercial.

What happens now? Is there an enemy waiting aboard the ship? Does the ship run out of fuel, forcing the character to land aboard a hostile alien planet? Perhaps the Showrunner decides to really turn up the drama. An SC significant to the PC is trapped. And in danger. And needs their help! And of course, is located where the PC just escaped from! In this case, the Showrunner has not taken control of the character per se, but instead driven the story in a new direction.

## Success

Success is success. The character succeeds. The scenario was just how they envisioned it might be. The PC escapes, and is able to move towards a course of action that they have some control over.

This brings forth the question of how much control is too much. Where is the line? At what point does a Showrunner risk alienating the players?

There is obviously no secret formula.

If a character is trying to charm the evil space princess and the player cedes control of their character, the Showrunner might determine that the next time we see the character, they are shirtless and in the private chambers of said evil princess.

Some players might find this incredibly problematic: "There is no way my character would ever..."

Important to note here is the fact that the Showrunner never declared what happened; there is likely a very obvious implication and a strong inference, but the Showrunner can dial it back by revealing, over the course of the Scene, that although the evil space princess may have wanted to make the character her companion/ love slave/ betrothed, he resisted. Why is he shirtless? Because of the little pill we didn't see her handmaiden drop into his wine, of course.

So, in this scenario, the character has ceded control – something "very bad" happened to them; the story went in an unexpected direction and hopefully, the player is willing to accept it.

But, the moral is: Players should not want to cede control of their characters, because bad things can happen. Perhaps failure *is* a better option.

# The Intention System Reboot

Perhaps the idea of character control is not granular enough for you and your group. We therefore present an alternative resolution mechanic that Showrunners might decide to adopt wholesale or piecemeal. The two systems can work with each other, or independent of each other. One gaming group might decide to use only the system as written, one might decide to use only the System Reboot rules, and a third group might decide to use both, as the Showrunner sees fit, perhaps even with player input.

| Intention Results (For the Reboot Version) | |
|---|---|
| **Die Total:** | **What Happens:** |
| 2-6 | The character fails. Failure means failure, there is no way around it. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: Fail and empower a different character **OR** Succeed and hinder a different character. |
| 10+ | The character succeeds. |

To empower a different character, the character's actions fail, but in failure, another character is able to more likely move towards success. Mechanically, the character fails, but is able to give a +2d Benefit to another character. This character will likely be determined by the player, and will likely be a fellow PC, but there are times when the Showrunner will decide which character will receive the benefit, and there are times when a SC will receive the benefit. This 2d Benefit is directly related to the character's failure, but might not occur immediately. The character does not succeed in getting to their starfighter, their starfighter blows up. But, because they drew the attention of the enemy soldiers, another character is able to make their escape, be it another character also attempting to get to a starfighter or perhaps in a Scene happening in another location entirely. Noble sacrifices are encouraged.

Hindering another character means that given a choice, the character succeeded, but the cost is at the expense of another character, in the form of a -2d Obstacle. The character succeeds in getting into their starfighter and escaping, but this causes the soldiers to be on high alert and lock down all hangars, causing a second PC to suffer in their attempt. This also makes for great television. And, players may talk amongst themselves, and decide that this option is preferable, the narrative being that the character being hindered understands the risks, and is encouraging the other player (and their character) to succeed.

## "I'LL BE OKAY"

There is no system for damaging PCs in *Retrostar*. This was intentional.

If a player knows just how much punishment their character can take, they may use this knowledge to push their character.

The Intention System does away with all that, for the sake of telling compelling stories.

We know who the stars of the show are. We know they will not die. This is a conceit. The Intention System embraces this.

Does this mean the characters are invulnerable?

No.

You can assign a penalty to their Intents based on any "damage" (or "injury") they might have sustained.

Don't do this all the time, though. It gets old. Fast.

Yes, you can assign a -1d Obstacle to a character who was shot by a blaster. But not for every Adventure Intent. Can the player figure out a workaround? Can they accomplish a goal in a different way? You can hamstring, but do so creatively and only for a limited amount of time.

But, you ask, how long? Maybe for a whole Scene. Maybe just for one Intent. Maybe the effects linger over several Scenes, but only affect the character performing certain types of actions. A character shot in the leg might not be able to run and jump as well, but they can still fire their blaster? Their limp is significant and noticeable, but, because these are heroic characters, they will find a way to work past it. A Thought Intent might have left the character slightly brain-scrambled, and unable to focus. A Drama Intent might have the character stumble over their own words or even make a social faux pas.

For the character who was shot in the leg, is there a moment when they tighten the bandage, gritting their teeth, and push on? Yes! These are cool moments. Or maybe another character helps them, even if it exposes them to danger as well.

The Intention System wagers the most significant stake of all: free will. Showrunners should move the stories in unexpected directions. This is compelling.

## ASSISTING OTHER CHARACTERS

It happens. Players want to help other players, their characters want to help other characters. In this situation, the character assisting will state their Intent (how they are going to help the other character). If the Showrunner decides this is acceptable, the assisting player will make a roll as normal, with Benefits and Obstacles applied as usual.

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| | **Assisting Results** |
| 2-6 | Out and out failure. The assisting player has now added a -1d Obstacle to the other player. |
| 7-9 | No effect, and maintain control: the assisting player was not successful, but did not hinder, and they maintain control of their character. *OR* Success and cede control: The assisting player gives a 2d Benefit to the other player, but cedes control of their character. |
| 10+ | Success! The assisting character gives a 2d Benefit to the other player. |

This allows a character to use Thought to assist an Adventure Intent, for example, allowing each player to play to their strengths for the benefit of "the team."

Many roleplayers have found themselves in the following situation:

**Player A:** "I attempt to disarm the gizmo." Player makes a roll. The GM determines it is not a success.

**Player B:** "I also attempt this."

**Player C:** "I am going to assist Player B. This will give them a bonus to their roll."

And this scenario might be repeated ad nauseam.

Is this fun? Is it exciting? Is it dramatic? For the sake of *Retrostar*, we will say: No.

Every Intent should be significant. Whenever a player declares an Intent, this is a moment when the Scene is focused on them. We want a *Retrostar* game to encourage this degree of coolness.

Thus, the next component of the Intention System: Time Management.

Time Management limits the number of rolls players make in an Episode. Every roll is significant. Just as importantly, every roll moves the action forward towards the exciting conclusion of the Episode.

### About the 5-Act Structure

Researching 1970s sci-fi television shows, uncovered the fact that many used the 5-Act structure. Simply stated, the 5-Act Structure is as follows:

**Act 1:** A problem is introduced, the problem evolves, stakes established, characters try to solve the problem.

**Act 2:** Stakes rise until temporary solution is found, the calm before the storm.

**Act 3:** Things get better, then get much worse.

**Act 4:** The darkest hour, all hope is lost, until... a solution appears.

**Act 5:** The final payoff. The characters succeed and/or some sort of resolution is found.

In Chapter 7 we will go into much more detail about how to emulate the structure of a television show to get maximum enjoyment and excitement at your gaming table.

For now, what you need to know is this:

• For a one-hour show, there are 5 Acts.

• Each Act may, of course, have multiple Scenes, but each Act has a limited number of Intents.

• Each Act has only 12 dice rolls allowed. The Showrunner will, in plain view of everyone, track the rolls made (a twelve-sided die accomplishes this very nicely!), track the dice rolls made each Act. As the number of dice rolls increase, the Showrunner is responsible for moving the narrative of the Act forward, often in surprising ways (...surprising even to *them* at times).

Time Management does several things: It ensures that every Intent a player has is significant; it moves the story forward in a way that all can appreciate; it helps players share the proverbial spotlight, because if every character acts as in the Scene above, where every character is attempting the same task, rolls will quickly be used up, and in terms of storytelling, we spent 10 minutes of viewing time watching characters do the same thing over and over again. Boring! Episodes of the old sci-fi shows clocked in at just under an hour (half that for the kid-based shows), so time is always of the essence in *Retrostar*!

## INITIATIVE

**Q:** Who goes first?

**A:** The players.

The Intention System is player-driven. Players make the vast majority of dice rolls. Thus, who goes first is not that important. Players do not need to get the jump on their enemies. Enemies are acting, the players are reacting.

The Showrunner will determine which player goes first, and sometimes, the Showrunner's word is law. Other times, the players can offer up a different solution. After all, this is a collaborative effort. Players will likely want all of their characters to succeed, so players (and their characters) may very well try and assist each other – either mechanically, by rolling dice, or just by helping determine the initiative order.

Now, all of this "let's work together" stuff is great, but there are times when real danger is imminent. The characters are facing off against an overwhelming number of enemies. And the one character who is poor at Adventure is declared to be first. The players might protest; that is too bad. Sometimes, bad things happen. If this is an epic battle scene, that character must act first, but it is possible that they will hole up and let the more action-oriented characters control the Scene. This happens. It happens on TV, it can happen here. The other characters bravely face off against the enemies, driving them back while the characters with poor Adventure huddle behind a rock. Once their initial Intent is resolved, there is no crime in this. What it means is that the character in question is not doing much of anything. Or maybe they can assist with a Thought Intent... after their Adventure Intent, as mandated by the Showrunner. And, potentially, other characters can assist this poor-Adventure character with this Adventure Intent by laying down suppressing fire or whatever else seems appropriate and comes to mind.

Commander, I have inputted the data into the computer to run a risk assessment and determine our probability of success.

**Standard Intention**
Failure(2-6): 41.67%
Success(10+): 11.67%

**Intention with 1 Obstacle (Roll 3d, keep the lowest 2)**
Failure: 68.06%
Success: 5.07%

**Intention with 2 Obstacles**
Failure: 82.63%
Success: 1.55%

**Intention with 3 Obstacles**
Failure: 90.57%
Success: .47%

**Intention with 4 Obstacles**
Failure: 94.89%
Success: .15%

**Intention with 5 Obstacles**
Failure: 97.23%
Success: .05%

**Intention with 1 Benefit (Roll 3d, keep the highest 2)**
Failure: 19.45%
Success: 35.65%

**Intention with 2 Benefits**
Failure: 9.04%
Success: 52.16%

**Intention with 3 Benefits**
Failure: 4.21%
Success: 65.16%

**Intention with 4 Benefits**
Failure: 1.99%
Success: 74.93%

**Intention with 5 Benefits**
Failure: .95%
Success: 82.08%

Clever special effects and colorful supporting characters both played an enormous role in the success of the science fiction shows of the era. Without laser beams and space ships or strange aliens and insidious villains, the shows wouldn't have been able to capture the imagination of the viewers. They are crucial aspects of what made those programs resonate with fans, young and old alike.

## SFX

Special effects were kind of a big deal in the 1970s, especially for television. Every special effect meant a significant increase to the budget, and thus, producers wanted to capitalize on them and they had to be cool.

As such, players and Showrunners have an SFX budget.

Every Episode, players have a number of SFX points to spend on their characters' personal SFX, predetermined by the Showrunner, as well as occasional "one-Episode only" SFX.

The Showrunner has a pool of SFX to be used in much the same way.

> The Showrunner gets a pool of SFX points equal to the total number of SFX the players have.

For example, 4 players, each with an SFX pool of 3, would mean the Showrunner had 12 SFX points to spend.

Every blast of a laser pistol, every swing of an ionic sword, every computer screen with computer graphics... these were SFX. We have broadened SFX here to also encompass other one-shot (per Episode) effects, which might include a sexy character slipping into a skintight silver spacesuit or a character ripping off their shirt or an awesome stunt, be it a karate chop or an impressive feat of strength.

The game design philosophy behind the SFX pool is that characters should get a bonus when they use SFX, as SFX were key to the viewing experience. There are no throwaway SFX!

### The SFX Department
As ironic as this might seem, there is no science to SFX creation. Use the SFX Dial as a barometer of how significant SFX are.

Now, the Showrunner will ask themselves: "How often do I want players using their SFX?"

If the answer is "frequently", then SFX should have a cost of 1.

If the Showrunner wants each use of the SFX to be significant, the cost should be higher, because a higher cost will generate a greater benefit.

The effect of SFX is the cost +1d, so an SFX with a cost of one would have a +2d effect, written as 1/ +2d. An SFX with a cost of 3 would be 3/ +4d.

A couple examples of how a Showrunner can gauge SFX:

In the *Family Nuclear* Series (see pages 77-78), the SFX Dial is 3, so every character has a pool of 3 SFX points to spend.

Each character has numerous cybernetic enhancements. So, one character (the cousin Robbie, who didn't make it from pilot to series), has:

- Cybernetic Arm
- Cybernetic Legs
- Cybernetic Eyes

In addition, several of these enhancements have special abilities.

- Cybernetic Legs (Leap)
- Cybernetic Eyes (Thermal Scan, X-Ray)

The Showrunner decides that some of these enhancements have multiple possible effects, and notates the following Robbie's character sheet:

- Cybernetic Arm 1/ +2d
- Cybernetic Legs 1/ +2d, Leaping 2/ +3d
- Cybernetic Eyes 1/ +2d, Scanning (Thermal, X-Ray, etc.) lasts for more than one action 1/ +2d

With the Scanning the Showrunner decided that this SFX should be in play for more than one action. How long? Maybe a whole Scene; it depends on what is happening. But if the SFX department is going to use IR cameras or even an X-Ray effect, they want it to be memorable.

### Can Players Modify Their SFX?
The player playing Robbie wanted Laser Blasts from his cybernetic eyes. This request happened in the middle of a game.

The Showrunner thought about it and decided this was a very cool idea and allowed it. For a cost of 3/ +4d.

But, Robbie's player had already spent some of his SFX pool.

## Gaining More SFX
There are two options here:

*Option 1:* Because the budget is for the Episode, characters can give SFX points to other players to spend.

This is easy.

*Option 2:* In-game, a character might need more than his fellow players can give, or they are reluctant to share.

Characters can attempt to create more SFX points for themselves or other players. Likely this would be a Thought-based Intent, but there may very well be situations that would allow for Adventure and Drama ("We can harvest quantonic energy from this fallen meteor, we just have to bring it back to the starship" or one character might seduce or talk their way into a source of more SFX using a Drama Intent.)

However, a Showrunner should not allow every Episode to devolve into a quest for SFX. This should be allowed infrequently, and there should be a definitive cap on the number of SFX points allowed to be gained this way. And whether it is one point gained per Intent or numerous points, this is all up to the Showrunner. So, if players need to recharge their laser pistols for the final Act, they just might be able to. Or not.

This is Showrunner fiat.

**Players, do not expect this to be a regular occurrence. Just because it is in the rulebook doesn't mean it is always allowed.**

## Example
A soldier in a sci-fi series has a laser gun; so does their opponents.

The SFX rating for the series is 4.

However, the Showrunner dœsn't want every Episode to have incredibly long laser gun battles, so he assigns the following SFX:

- Laser Gun 2/ +3d

Each character will be able to use their laser gun for added effect twice per Episode.

Read this part again: *for added effect.*

A character can use their laser gun more frequently, but it won't add anything to their roll. Translation: There was not money in the SFX budget to have the SFX department to add another laser blast. Maybe the character fires it, and we hear the awesome audio sound effect, but don't see the blast.

But, when it is used for effect, we see the laser fire from the gun. Budget has been spent.

**MAKING YOUR OWN SFX (SHOWRUNNERS)**
It's up to the Showrunner to create SFX for the characters. The formula is simple:

- 1 point / +2d
- 2 points / +3d
- 3 points / +4d
- 4 points/ +5d
- 5 points/ +6d

Now, decide how frequently you want cool SFX in the hands of the players and distribute the points accordingly.

Psionic powers, cybernetics, monochrome computer screen graphics, lasers, swords made of energy, a martial arts kata, sexy lighting... these can all be SFX!

## Making Your Own (Players)
Your Showrunner has carefully crafted SFX for your character. If you need or want something outside of what has been assigned to you, ask nicely, come up with a cool idea, and cross your fingers.

Sometimes, these player-created SFX will eventually be added to your character sheet as your character becomes known for them.

## One-Shot Effects
Often in Episodes, there are one-time-only SFX. Sometimes, these will be for the benefit of the players ("I am breaching the security on the ship's computer system"—cue awesome 1970s computer screen graphics), sometimes they will be for the benefit of the SCs.

Sometimes, the points spent will not exactly follow the formula. This is the Showrunner's prerogative. See the above computer graphics example.

Breaking into the computer might be a Thought Intent. The visuals are for the benefit of the audience.

The effect might allow a character to spend 1 point for a +2d effect to be used later, or might be a free +1d effect to be used later.

Navigating through an asteroid field might cost the Showrunner 1 point for +2d negative effect on the players (1 point/ per player navigating). This can be different from an Obstacle (see pages 42-45), and sometimes the two will work together to make life especially difficult for a character.

A giant laser cannon that causes awesome explosions might be 3/ +4d as an Osbtacle to any player actions. This was a huge set-piece for the SFX department, and uses much of the Showrunner's SFX pool, as each shot uses 3 SFX points!

## Showrunner Characters and SFX
Some SCs will have SFX assigned to them that the PCs will not have access to. These do not need to be assigned during series creation, but should be noted.

An especially strong SC might have an awesome feat of strength, while the alien overlord might have cool psychic powers. These all act

as further Obstacles against PCs and require an expenditure of points from the Showrunner's SFX pool.

Super-awesome powerful SFX can be problematic, **should** be problematic, and should scare the PCs.

How to accomplish this?

The psychic alien overlord has an incredibly powerful Psychic Blast 4/ +5d. 5d as an Obstacle is potentially devastating.

Because the Showrunner has a pool of SFX, he can build the dramatic tension by building up the SFX. Start out the Psychic Blast at 1/ +2d, the next action, increase it to 2/ +3d, etc. Because, likely, the alien overlord already has a rating assigned to them that might well be 3d or even 4d. An Obstacle of 5d+4d= 9d is very, very nasty. Describe the Psychic Blast; how it becomes more powerful. And spend points accordingly.

Similarly, if the Showrunner starts running out of SFX points, one can use this Blast at less than full power.

Either way, insert evil laughter!

There is no hard science to SFX. Think of cool stuff and use it. Allow your players and their characters to do the same.

The design philosophy is this: *If you give a player an ionic sword, they will want to use it.*

What is not stated in this is the qualifier: *All the Time!*

This wasn't the way 70s sci-fi worked, so you can give a player an ionic sword, but they won't be using it with every Intent. The same goes for awesome cybernetics, or psychic powers, or any such thing!

## SHOWRUNNER CHARACTERS

Most of the time, Showrunners don't act, they are reacted to and acted against. This puts the majority of the dice-rolling and the majority of the Intentions in the hands of the players.

But, acting against an SC is not without its problems.

Showrunner Characters have a die rating attached to them: e.g. 0d, 1d, 2d, 3d, 4d, 5d

In this way, they are Obstacles (see pages 42-45).

> Any action against an SC will use this die rating as a penalty.

Shooting a guard is the same as talking your way past them, except one Intent likely uses Adventure and one Intent uses Drama.

And the same philosophy applies to more significant SCs. So, when trying to charm the Evil Empress or fight against her, the penalty is the same (4d).

### Assigning Dice
It's not always easy to know exactly what numbers to use for SCs. The trick is to spitball it, using this section as a guideline.

### Basic Flunkies
Flunkies are faceless minions, soldiers and other background characters. In short, they are extras who will likely spend their screen time standing there or getting beat up or shot up by characters of a higher echelon.

*Basic flunkies are 0d.*

Why? Because they can use SFX, and because success should happen more often than not for the players. They are a nuisance, but any time a character is rolling, there is a chance

for failure. Rolling 5d and keeping the best two is no guarantee of success. It is likely, but not a sure thing.

When they use SFX, this makes them obviously tougher opponents.

### Elite Flunkies
Elite flunkies, although likely still nameless, are a cut above basic flunkies. They are better trained or better equipped.

*Elite flunkies are 1d.*

### Minor Named Characters
Minor Named Characters are the characters who act as lower-level henchmen or other supporting character that is rather competent, but not quite to "main character" status.

*Minor named characters are 2d.*

### Major Named Characters
Highly efficient at what they do, major named characters pose serious threats to anyone who goes up against them. Most of them are right-hand men of a series master villain.

*Major named characters are 3d.*

### Master Characters
Master characters represent the heaviest hitters of the series; the characters who (rightly) inspire fear in those who oppose them. They present a massive struggle to their foes. The most common example of this type of character is the show's primary villain.

*Master characters are 4d, 5d or even higher.*

## From Many, One
The characters are being attacked by a wave of enemy soldiers (0d). Because the characters are the ones acting and reacting, they will do all the rolling. In a situation like this, a character might decide to take on several or to take on one. This choice can also be made by the Showrunner:

"Four soldiers surround you and try and bring you down" clearly states there are 4 soldiers (0d) attacking a character.

In situations like this, every additional SC adds an extra die to the effect. So, for the above example, 4 soldiers (0d) will give the player a 0d+3d= 3d penalty to their roll.

If the character makes the choice "I am going to attack 4 of them," the math is the same.

Don't forget SFX where applicable.

And there is nothing wrong with an Act ending in the middle of an action-packed Scene. It happens all the time. However, fights shouldn't take up too much time, unless they are epic. All those stuntmen, all those SFX—that is a lot of money.

## Unlikely Allies and One-On-One Opponents

Sometimes, an SC will be an ally to the players. These SCs can be created the same way as a Player Character, with a Background, Casting, Traits, Descriptors, SFX and possibly even Personal Dials.

And when they roll dice, it is the same as when the players roll, except the Showrunner rolls the dice.

It still counts as a roll for time management. And they can still fail or succeed.

### Opposed Intentions

Then, there are times when one character might be facing off against another, this could be an SC and a Player Character or it could even (gasp) be two Player Characters.

A character is trapped on an alien planet and must compete in gladiatorial combat against a hulking alien fœ or two Player Characters are vying for the same widget, each having a different agenda.

How is this handled?

With an SC, the character is created the same as a Player Character, and played by the Showrunner.

This dœs not always have to be the case, though. These types of SC vs Player Character encounters should be rare indeed, as they will be very epic! In most instances, a player facing a dice penalty is sufficient.

Both dice rolls will be recorded for time management purposes and there is a table found on the following column that is used to determine what happens with the dice.

Success here dœsn't indicate that one player has definitively won, but it means this particular mini-conflict is resolved.

### Opposed Intentions

| | | Character A: | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | 2-6 | 7-9 | 10+ |
| Character B: | 2-6 | Both fail, the Showrunner decides what happens, either they are both out, or they may continue. | Character A partially succeeds, character B suffers a -1d penalty. | Character A succeeds. |
| | 7-9 | Character B partially succeeds, character A suffers a -1d penalty. | Draw! characters may continue, both suffering a -1d penalty. | Character A succeeds. |
| | 10+ | Character B succeeds. | Character B succeeds. | Draw! Characters may continue. |

For example: The hulking alien (a SC) succeeds. Both characters rolled, so two rolls are accounted for in terms of time management.

The Showrunner describes the hulking alien pushing the Player Character off a cliff.

The Scene ends.

In the next Scene, we might see the Player Character recovering, preparing to engage his fœ yet again.

The determination of what success means is up the Showrunner. Perhaps a character suffers a significant penalty to a Trait or to all dice rolls... Perhaps the Scene ends, or perhaps the conflict is resolved. If you want the failing character to have a chance to continue, make them work for it. End the Scene. Maybe they have to find a way to use Thought to defeat the opponent or at least to try and re-engage the opponent.

# Dials and Spotlight Tokens

## SERIES DIALS

*"Don't touch that dial!"*

Every *Retrostar* Series has Dials. These Dials help define the Series, and provide a quick and easy way to glance at a Series, and see what it is about.

Each Series has 5 Dials, these Dials are rated from 0-6. For 4 of the 5 Dials, the higher a Dial rating, the more frequently the components of that Dial will come into play in a Series, and specifically in any Episode. The fifth Dial, SFX, are integral to a 1970s sci-fi experience, and are handled slightly differently (see Chapter 5). But, at a glance, the higher the rating in any of the Dials, the more significant that Dial is.

The Dials are:

- Thematic
- Plot
- Recurring
- Cheese
- SFX

These Dials are explained in Chapter 2 (see pages 30-32), we will now be looking at how to incorporate them into your *Retrostar* game.

*Retrostar* is not quite a "beer and pretzels" RPG, but does not necessarily require the session-to-session prep for a Showrunner that other games do. The Showrunner will put in most of the work preparing their Series, and individual sessions can be run with little to no prep. The Dials help facilitate this.

When preparing to run a *Retrostar* Episode, the Showrunner should roll a single d6 for each Dial, including SFX. If the number rolled comes up equal to or lower than the rating of the Dial, that Dial will be prominent in the Episode.

This is not to say that elements of a Dial cannot, should not, or will not make their way into an Episode if the Dial is not rolled, given the very free-form nature of an Episode, anything can happen, but when planning for an Episode, the Showrunner should note which Dials will be present and can begin jotting down some ideas.

Using *Battleground: Homefront*, Season 1 for an example (see pages 70-73), we roll the die!

| Example Results | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Roll: | Dial: | Rating: | Dial present in this Episode? |
| 2 | Thematic | 4 | Yes |
| 1 | Plot | 4 | Yes |
| 6 | Recurring | 4 | No |
| 2 | Cheese | 3 | Yes |
| 2 | SFX | 2 | Yes |

So, for the particular Episode, we will feature: Thematic, Plot, Cheese, and SFX.

Given the lack of Recurring, I am envisioning as one of those oddball Episodes many TV shows have, that seems somewhat incongruent to the rest of the Series. For the sake of Plot, this will be the 3rd Episode, and we will assume that we have already covered the pain of being cloned, and picking new recruits.

Deciding on the Plot element first can help the overall content of the Episode come into view, we know what Plot component we want to cover this Episode, how do we, as Showrunner(s), get from A to B?

Because of the lack of Recurring, we are going to ignore the Homefront aspect of the Series, and focus on the Battleground. This can tie in very nicely to the Plot component of meeting an identical clone. Given the novelty of having the same actor appear on screen as their twin (I think even The Love Boat used this gimmick), this will use a significant amount of the SFX budget, thus fulfilling the SFX requirement.

To mix things up a bit, I decide that I will let one of more of the players play two versions of their character. That will be fun and offputting. Better yet, I can tie in one of the Thematic components, by having the players play two different versions of their character without even knowing it.

I decide to incorporate the Theme of pollution and saving the earth. I will set the Episode at a large dam, perhaps one that is no longer functional, the player characters have to repair the dam. Why? Because they are ordered to. They are soldiers after all. Perhaps they are allied with several Far-Men, and the non-functioning dam affects them and everyone.

Inspiration strikes, I will have the characters face off against a band of pirates, who seek to use the dams power for themselves, holding those affected hostage. These are just opportunists, this is not related to The War, more related to the fact that things have fallen apart. But, what will happen is that the PCs will fail, facing overwhelming odds each time, ending in their death, and then in the next Act, have a chance to succeed again. Finally, in the 4th Act,

they will encounter another platoon of their clones, and will be able to, in larger numbers, take the Pirates down, save the dam, and provide clean water to everyone served by the dam! In the 4th and 5th Acts, they will also encounter the bodies of their fallen selves.

Act 5 can be a bit preachy, I'm not sure I will have a Native American cry, but something close. The players might also meet some of non-Far-Men who mean them no harm, as the curtain is peeled back, and the players start to question why they are fighting and what they are fighting for.

Thus, because so much work and thought was put into the creation of the Series, plotting a specific Episode, can be done very quickly. So, can a Showrunner run a game without any prep, when their gaming group drops by unannounced? If the Showrunner has done their due diligence, I would say yes.

To be fair, for the above Episode, I would need to stat up the pirates (they need a name too, how about the Dam Raiders, a not so clever play on the word damn), and assign them some SFX, maybe a Makeshift Laser Cannon 2/ +3d, and Black Laser Pistols (a play on black powder pistols) 1/ +2d. A definite Obstacle would be the Dam's computer, which would be 2d or 3d depending on how the battles doomed to fail went.

What will happen at the end of the Episode, when the dam is reactivated, fresh water restored, and there are now two versions of each character? I honestly do not know, I have it jotted down as something to remember, but I will see where the Episode goes, and I consider the possibility there will be no closure, and that will prove even more intriguing to the players (and the fictional viewers).

“I've just argued over the concept of love with a plant... and *lost*.”

— Adam Quark (*Quark*)

## PERSONAL DIALS

Thematic. Plot. Recurring. Cheese. These Dials are also applicable to players. As a Series develops and progresses, characters might decide to identify their own Personal Dials, be it a Thematic component personal to them, how the Plot relates specifically to their character, perhaps their own Recurring catchphrase or awesome karate move, and maybe, just maybe, even something Cheesy.

At the start of every Episode, the player may roll one die *for one of the Dials*, and if that Dial is present this session, they will inform the Showrunner, and note this. At some point in the Episode, the player will find that this Dial becomes relevant (sometimes this is driven by the Showrunner, most likely the Plot Dial, sometimes driven by the player). During the Episode, the player may add 3d to a roll. This should somehow be connected to the Dial. If a catchphrase, they can say it after completing an action (It isn't much fun to say a cool catchphrase and then fail!), if Plot, any action surrounding that Plot is appropriate. This a character's chance to connect with the fictional viewers.

Players might want to define these Personal Dials right from the start of a Series, but we suggest waiting until at least Episode 3. By that point, a player will have a better idea of what their character is about in relation to the Series and the other characters.

A character will only have one Personal Dial active in any given Episode. This is not to say that the Episode may not reference their other Personal Dials, they will not get a +3d bonus, however.

## SPOTLIGHT TOKENS

For any Intent, a character will roll dice, depending on their Adventure, Thought or Drama. A character with Drama of 1 will have a Descriptor attached (e.g. Sexy; Manly; Charming). The Trait value of 1 indicates the character is above average. This is reflected in the 1d being added to a roll.

But when is the character Sexy?

When the spotlight shines on them. This is where Spotlight Tokens come into play.

Any part of a Background, Casting, or Descriptor can be activated by spending a Spotlight Token.

But, you might ask, how does a player get these Spotlight Tokens? There is a pool of Spotlight Tokens available to the PCs.

Until characters begin defining their characters (see above, RE Personal Dials), there will be as many Spotlight Tokens as there are players multiplied by 3, and then subtracting 1.

So, for a Series with five players, there will be (5x3)-1 Spotlight Tokens. 14!

This is for the beginning of a Series.

As characters develop (i.e. define their Personal Dials), this number will decrease, until it is equal to the number of players multiplied by 2, plus 1. So, for our 5 player gaming group above, the number of Spotlight Tokens after the players had their Personal Dials defined would be (5x2)+1= 11.

Because this is a pool, players have to share them. This is a deliberate design choice. Sometimes, characters have to share the spotlight.

What does a Spotlight Token do?

*A Spotlight Token gives a PC +2d to an Intent.* My character has a phrase in their Background that says "Best friends since childhood with

Malcolm (the name of a PC)." I can grab a Spotlight Token when Malcolm is in trouble, and get +2d to my Intent.

The Sexy character (above) gets a chance to be really sexy, and grabs a Spotlight Token, and gets +2 to their Intent. And maybe the "teen magazine idol" mentioned in the Casting gets a chance to mug for the camera in a meta way, this is also worth +2 to an Intent.

The possibilities are endless!

## Deadly Spotlight Tokens

*The original idea of using cards with Retrostar seems to have not been as successful or intuitive as desired. This forces us to discard much of the original design goal. There is still something there though, beyond what our sensors can reach. We will investigate...*

Characters can't die in *Retrostar,* right? Right. Wrong. Dœs not compute.

Character death did happen, actors grew unhappy with their contracts, shows changed their focus, or maybe a character didn't die, they just were dropped from the cast.

If this is something you want in your *Retrostar* game, we have devised a way to make this happen.

Grab a deck of playing cards.

Leave the Jokers in the deck.

Every Episode, the Showrunner will deal a number of cards, face down, on the table equal to the number of Spotlight Tokens.

When a character wants to spend a Spotlight Token, they take a card, flip it over, and return it to the Showrunner.

If the card is a Joker, the character **might** be in trouble.

A Showrunner should not kill or write-off a character without first consulting the player. This is not to say that a Showrunner cannot declare that in a Series, death is a very real possibility.

The player gets to keep that card for the session. They gain the standard 2d Benefit. And, at some point in the Episode (or maybe next Episode if the card is drawn in the 5th Act), the player may re-roll any die or dice from an Intent. Keen readers will note, we did not say it had to be their roll. But, it should be something very appropriate to the Spotlight and how it was used. Perhaps a character's death gives their allies that split second needed to escape. Make it cool!

If this Deadly Token System is in place, the Showrunner should also consider using the same deck of cards for Personal Dials. Even going so far as to deal these cards out at the beginning of an Episode and allowing players to look at their card. Any player who draws a Joker might want to declare this at the beginning of an Episode, or keep the card hidden until the appropriate time.

*Retrostar* characters are allowed to die in an awesome way.

When and how they die is up to the player and/ or the Showrunner, depending how success and failure factor in. Our advice is, to let the character, and the player, have a moment.

# The Ratings Game

## 5-ACT STRUCTURE AND PACING

A quick refresher:

• **Act 1:** A problem is introduced, the problem evolves, stakes established, characters try to solve the problem.

• **Act 2:** Stakes rise until temporary solution is found, the calm before the storm.

• **Act 3:** Things get better, then get much worse.

• **Act 4:** The darkest hour, all hope is lost, until... a solution appears.

• **Act 5:** The final payoff. The characters succeed and/or some sort of resolution is found.

As established, each Act will have 12 Intents. The Showrunner's duty is to keep the pacing appropriately exciting for a 1970s sci-fi TV series. Each Act is likely made up of multiple Scenes. A Scene is a location, involving one or more PCs. The Showrunner needs to be acutely aware as each Act is drawing to a close (the number of Intents is building towards 12). Introduce a new Scene if needed. Not every Scene needs to reach a definitive conclusion. This is the way of episodic television. The players are as much participants in the Episode as they are "viewers."

In this chapter, we will give some tips and pointers for Showrunners to become comfortable with the Time Management elements of the Intention System.

Because of the meta-structure of *Retrostar*, if a Showrunner finds an Act having reached a conclusion, with Intents unused, here are some fun options: throw a curveball - introduce (or reintroduce) a romantic subplot or some sort of interpersonal issue for one or more characters; introduce a Recurring, Thematic or Cheese Scene, oftentimes in 1970s sci-fi, the inclusion of these Scenes felt very out of place. Your *Retrostar* series can capture this same awkwardness; introduce a new, secondary problem, the B-plot as it were; and, lastly, carry over the Intents to the next Act!

### Act 1
*A problem is introduced, the problem evolves, stakes established, characters try to solve the problem.*

Act 1 introduces the world and the characters. It introduces the problem for the Episode. But, the Showrunner should not necessarily reveal the entire problem. In terms of storytelling, a compelling problem is one that has many layers and is not at all easily resolved.

A Showrunner can also start with a teaser, a Scene before the opening credits, perhaps a Recurring Scene, or a Scene that leads us to believe everything is hunky dory and ok, until the problem rears it's ugly head!

If there are SCs to be introduced in this Episode they will often be introduced in Act 1. How will you introduce them?

As a Showrunner, the SCs are your characters, and they have motivations as well, and Showrunners should be encouraged to call upon Thought and Drama as well as Adventure!

In a particular Episode, I want to introduce a single father as a potential love interest for one of

the characters as well as being a character affected by the problem. I should recall one of the founding principles of the Intention System. What am I trying to do to another character? Instead of just having the character enter the Scene, and introducing them, I have them come in, proverbial guns blazing. The character attempts to verbally dress down one of the PCs, my SC is obviously upset and adversarial. This requires a Drama Intent from one (or more) characters.

## Act 1 and Act 2

*Stakes rise until temporary solution is found, the calm before the storm. Things get better, then get much worse.*

In Act 2, we will learn more about the problem, and discover what appears to be a solution, only it will not be as easy as it seems.

In Act 3 we go even deeper into the problem, and more and more obstacles are presented to the PCs.

Speaking with absolute frankness, Acts 2 and 3 can be the most challenging: narratively speaking, without any outside influence, they are what could be considered filler - false leads, red herrings, and a disco rollerskating tournament!

However, as a Showrunner, use failure to your advantage! If a character fails at a specific task, ask yourself: "What unexpected direction can I take this Episode?"

These are the components that make *Retrostar* engaging for players and Showrunners. If a Showrunner has done their homework in terms of Series creation, the world, galaxy, and solar system has all been created, thus exploring uncharted corners of it should not be that difficult.

Example: A PC is on a recon mission in their starfighter, looking for the macguffin, which is in a specific solar system. The Showrunner likely has an idea where this is going. The player, however fails a roll. Now, the Showrunner decides, what if the pilot ended up on an alien planet seemingly not related at all to the mission at hand, and had to deal with problems there. What if it was a planet that thematically tied into the Episode in some fashion.

These out-of-leftfield plot twists were not uncommon, and should be enthusiastically embraced by the Showrunner.

Acts 2 and 3 are where the real meat of the Episode is revealed. It is where the Showrunner can switch things up entirely from what was hinted at or expected in Act 1.

### Act 4
*The darkest hour, all hope is lost, until... a solution appears.*

The problem has been clearly established, now it must be resolved. Perhaps the characters fail, or a new threat appears!

Act 4 continues to up the ante building towards the finale, which is Act 5!

Failure is crucial here. Players will want to succeed, and the Showrunner should be merciless if they fail, remove them from the Scene (or Scenes), bad things are happening, now is not the time for failure!

A Showrunner's use of their SFX pool can help the Showrunner manipulate Intents to their liking, increasing the difficulty by putting Obstacles in the paths of the players.

Additionally, use the environment, think of Act 4 as where the Showrunner teases the audience with inevitable failure of the PCs. Throw in an impassable chasm, have the solateic battery of their starfighter crap out, you are in control. If things are going the players' way too easily, give them Obstacles!

## Cliffhangers

Sadly, this is not a sidebar stating that Spectrum has secured the rights to the short lived 1979 NBC TV Series of the same name, but rather, is a brief discussion of the use of cliffhangers in a *Retrostar* game.

Because of the time management aspect of the Intention System, a Cliffhanger can be a wonderful tool for a Showrunner to transition from one Act to the next.

A Showrunner (and the players) know that each Act has only 12 Intents. Therefore, if they are in the middle of doing something, everyone knows that the Act has to end soon. If the players are in the middle of doing something, the Showrunner has every right to end the Act. Ask everyone seated at the table to take a break, grab a drink from the fridge, order some pizza, get some more dip for the chips.

Players might assume that the next Act will pick up right where it left off.

But, the Showrunner does not have to do this. They can have the action at hand resolve off-screen, and perhaps the how of the resolution is added to the problem the PCs face, or perhaps the Showrunner adds a totally unexpected wrinkle to the cliffhanger problem.

The other type of cliffhanger, is to introduce something entirely unexpected, and dangerous, and dramatic, and certain to throw the PCs off-guard, and leave the fictional viewers at home glued to their TVs. Introduce it, and have one or two Intents focused on it, and end the Act. Maybe there is an unexpected appearance by the Big Bad of the Series, or an enemy base in an unexpected location, the more gonzo the better! Think of your players as the viewers, and give them a teaser demanding they stay tuned!

> "Well, I'm scheduled for execution and if I miss it, I could be in a lot of trouble."
> — Buck Rogers (*Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*)

## Act 5

*The final payoff. The characters succeed and/ or some sort of resolution is found.*

One of the conceits of *Retrostar* is that Act 5 in episodic television was not only the climax, but also the resolution. Resolution in *Retrostar* is more narrative than anything else: the crew cheering on the bridge when the enemy fleet was stopped (likely) dœs not require an Intent, nor dœs the touching moment between the SC and the PC.

Now, it is possible that the PCs will resolve a problem quickly, and a Showrunner will have Intents left before the conclusion, Act 5 can also be about levity. So, after the enemy has been defeated, maybe it is time for that rollerskating contest! Or, a Showrunner can also start planting seeds for future Episodes, by hinting at situations that will not be resolved.

Give all the players a chance to participate, failure should hinder, but not cripple, unless appropriate for a particular character, and for the pacing!

Now, of course, as Showrunners, our goal is for the PCs to have success. It says so in the description of Act 5. But sometimes, the dice do not cooperate. In this case, the Showrunner needs to improvise yet again. The enemies win. What dœs this mean? Sounds to me like a 2-part Episode, with the ominous "To Be Continued" at the 59th minute on the television screen. Failure is what makes a story interesting after all. Or perhaps this failure dramatically alters the Series (permanently or temporarily). Let the dice help drive the story, and capitalize on success and failure!

### FAILURE IS NOT FAILURE

Failure is an opportunity to introduce new elements and complications into the story.

Players know that their characters are ostensibly invulnerable. There are no Hit Points after all. But failure can be even worse: a player can lose control of their character.
A Showrunner should use failure as a chance to tell an interesting story, to make the viewing experience compelling for everyone.

### A TWO-HOUR TELEVISION EVENT

A Showrunner might want to run an awesome, epic season finale two-hour film, or perhaps a 90 minute mid-season spectacular.

Adjusting the time management is simple: a 2-hour Episode might have three 20-minute Acts and two 30-minute Acts. A 90-minute Episode might have four 20 minute Acts and one 10-minute Act. As a Showrunner, all that is important is that you plan this timing down prior to the start of the Episode and inform the players of the timing of each Act.

The other consideration in these epic television events is the usage of SFX and Spotlight Tokens. The allocation of these resources is dependent on the 60-minute episodic structure.

Showrunners have numerous options available to them.

Treat every 60 minutes as one unit. Thus, a 90-minute Episode would give each player 1.5 times the SFX, as well as the players a pool of

Spotlight Tokens 1.5 times as large as a normal Episode, and for a 2-hour Episode, this multiplier would be 2.

Or, in terms of pacing, a Showrunner can break the Episode up into blocks of time based on the 60-minute structure, so a 90-minute Episode would be broken down into one 30-minute block of time, where players would have half the SFX and Spotlight Tokens normally allocated to them The key to this pacing working is for the Showrunner to inform the Players how the blocks of time will be allocated, so that players can expend their resources accordingly.

In a 90-minute Episode, the Showrunner determines that the first 30 minutes will be packed with excitement and action, that the first 30 minutes is half a block of time. Players will want to expend their SFX and Spotlight Tokens as these 30 minutes wind down. After the 30 minutes, and a commercial break, of course, their pools will refresh to the amount normally allocated in a 60-minute Episode. This type of pacing will ensure that resources are expended in a manner consistent with the need for consistent viewership and ratings across the whole Episode.

What about Personal Dials? If the Showrunner is breaking the Episode into blocks, players should be allowed to roll their Personal Dials once each block.

If the Showrunner is just multiplying the resources available to the players, players should be allowed to roll multiple times, rounding up. So, for a 90-minute or 2-hour Episode, a character could make 2 personal dials rolls, and yes, both these rolls could be on the same dial.

## What About Kidvid?

30-minute Episodes can be done, use the formula, and obviously, divide all SFX numbers and Spotlight Tokens in half. However, these shows did not always follow the 5-act format, and some shows were actually created so that each 30 minutes was half of a 2-part Episode.

There were even kidvid shows that operated on a 15-minute Episode standard. Emulation purists might find most 30-minute kidvid series mundane to play in for more than a couple of sessions, as not much changed, and the Episode structure tended to be quite formulaic. For a 3-Act structure, an Episode would have 10 Intentions per Act.
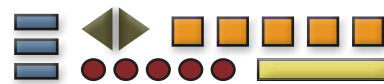
"We all learned an important rule today. Each of us—old and young alike—has a skill. Everyone can contribute to society in his own way. It's a rule we should all remember. Forget it, and man takes a giant step... backwards."

— Jonah (*Ark II*)

With three players in a gaming group, a standard 60-minute Episode, each character will average 20 Intents, or more specifically, each character will get 4 Intents per Act.

4 dice rolls per Act.

This might not seem like many, but in play, as everyone becomes comfortable with the Intention System and Intents, 4 dice rolls are potentially 4 very cool things each player is doing.

For a 6-player game, halve those numbers: 2 dice rolls per Act per player.

The time management aspect of *Retrostar* encourages players to work together, even if they are in competition with one another.

In this proverbial 6-player game, players might want the make an Intent in a crucial situation; everyone wants to be a star after all. But because the number of Intents is limited, they will

quickly find themselves running out of possible Intents. Everyone has a chance to shine, and everyone can contribute. The Showrunner's job is to keep the story moving forward.

But, what about a one-player series? Can it be done? The impossible is made real in an RPG.

*Retrostar* is designed to emulate the genre of 1970s sci-fi, so we needed to address series that starred only one character.

In this situation, 12 Intents is a lot. 60 rolls for one player. What does failure mean for one character. A Showrunner might find a single-player series both frustrating and exhausting. So, bring in the co-stars and the guest stars.

Likely, the star character of a single-person series will need some help from time to time. Because of the way character traits are assigned, they will also likely be strong (gaining a Benefit) in two Traits and weak in one or, possibly even strong in only one.

The Showrunner is encouraged to make co-stars and guest stars to help the single character out. Co-stars should fill the niches the star does not, so a starring character has an Adventure and Drama of 1, and a Thought of -1, a recurring co-star would have a Thought of at least 1.

Guest stars can fill these weaker niches, or also have niche overlap with the star.

These SCs will roll dice, thus using Intents.

A Showrunner is encouraged to adopt the Reboot rules (see page 47) for the SCs, with a goal of assisting the star character with most actions if possible.

A Showrunner might even fully create some of these characters, with a Background, Casting, etc. This will surely help bring them to life, and although they are just support staff, as it were, for the starring character, they will no doubt be significant as the Series progresses.

# Retrostar Series

To get groups out there playing right away, or just to give some inspiration for their own Series, we are presenting several full Series and Series Seeds. Additionally, many of the Series will have notes attached, possibly offering up alternative rules and suggestions for Showrunners to embrace and make their own. *Retrostar* can't be broken by making it your own. It is in your hands now, and what you do with it is entirely up to you.

## PLOT DIALS?

The Plot Dials for each Series will be detailed in Appendix 1. Players may indeed peruse this section, but it might be more fun if only Showrunners read this, as some of the Plot elements are best served with the element of surprise.

### Full Series vs. Series Seeds

The full Series found in this chapter are just what they sound like: complete Series that are ready to play with barely any prep work (namely PC creation). By contrast, Series Seeds are very "bare bones" Series that offer you foundations upon which you can build the rest of the details.
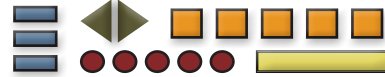
# Battleground:
# HOMEFRONT

## Season One

### Created by Barak Blackburn

## Pitch

*Characters live the high life as their clones fight in a morally questionable unwinnable war.*

The characters are clones. While their original form lives the high-life aboard the space station far above the polluted earth, their clones fight a Vietnam-like war down on earth. It's a very dark Series. Life aboard the space station is very '70s (discos, soft lighting, etc.). The characters are the upper-class because they have allowed themselves to be cloned. Their clones, however, are disposable grunts. The big question here is: Will the clones revolt? Dark, dark things will happen, secrets will be uncovered.

## Intro

"You don't ever remember life as a plebe. All you have known is this existence. Treated like royalty amongst the royalty: you are the beautiful people; you are the perfect physical specimens. Somewhere, out there, there is another you. Fighting the war against the Cros. Fighting to regain control of Earth. Fighting for the survival of all humankind. But not you. You dine on the finest foods, attend the most exclusive galas, and are sought after by the most influential members of society."

## Summary

Earth was long ago deemed uninhabitable. Man took to space while Gaia repaired herself. At least that is what the scientists hope and claim. Many were left behind. Society's wealthiest built a massive space station, larger than the old state of Rhode Island. But they brought with them the working class as well. After all, someone had to care for them. Generations later, there is unrest, both aboard the space station Roanoke as well as on terra firma. Those left behind, the Cros, have been rebuilding society. This does not please President Hecate and her Council. Attempts to land shuttles have proven fruitless, but she will not be stopped. Drawing from the ranks of the plebes, the working class, the Roanoke Council has begun the Pinkerton Initiative: plebes would be offered all the best the Council has to offer... in exchange for their consent to being cloned. Localized teleportation allows for small squads and teams to be sent planetside to fight Cro insurgents. But the Pinks aren't alone. Their allies, the Far-Men, seek to restore order to Earth.

### Showrunner Notes
Two Seasons of *Battleground: Homefront* are presented here to show how a show can change from one season to the next.

## Series Dials

**T** (dial at 4)
- Anti-war protests
- Woman's Choice
- Save the earth/pollution
- Vietnam
- Communism
- Classism

**P** (dial at 4)

(See Appendix 1)

**R** (dial at 4)
- Seduction with soft-lighting
- Opulence (a gigantic swimming pool aboard the  space station, a high society party)
- The War - planetside skirmishes.
- Strange Cities: a city of all women, a city of greasers straight out of the 1950s
- 70s era sporting event: jai-alai, soccer, roller derby, skateboarding
- Implied drug use

**C** (dial at 3)
- Disco
- Communes
- Native American themes

**SFX** (dial at 2)
- An enemy compound
- The Cloning Facility
- Laboratory
- Battlefield with tanks and aircraft
- Cros attempting to rebuild a spaceship
- An actor appearing with themselves on-screen.

## Details

### Significant SCs

- **President Hecate: 3d**
  Leader of the Roanoke Council - attractive, yet serious middle-aged woman
- **Dr. Rose: 3d** (Dr. Rose also has access to a Neural Blaster SFX 2/+3d)
  Charming, yet sinister doctor, older gentleman, speaks with a proper accent, and some affectations, bad toupee
- **Captain Gaines: 2d**
  The Roanoke stationed leader of the PCs combat unit
- **Cros: 1d**
- **Cro leaders: 2d**
- **Enemy Clones: 2d**

### Common SFX

- **Laser guns:** 1/+2d
- **Tanks, aircraft:** 2/+3d, 3/+4d

## Details (cont.)

### Style
• **Aboard Space Station:** high-end 70s fashion—platform shœs, polyester suits, miniskirts, revealing blouses, feathered hair, hot pants, jersey wrap dresses, glam rock, wide-collar shirts, frosted hair, shag, flick hairstyles, sideburns
• **Plebes:** everyday 1970s fashions—floral prints, polyester, bell-bottoms, dirty jeans, baseball sleeve shirts with sayings, straight, simple hair
• **Planetside (Cros):** punk rock (black leather, earrings, mohawks, spiky hair), Native American æsthetic
• **Far-Men:** polyester/ rayon suits, platform shœs, wide collar shirts
• **Military Uniforms:** tight olive green pants, black cropped padded jackets

### Terminology
• **Cros (some are known by their three-fingered hands):** enemies
• **Far-Men:** planetside allies
• **Zees:** upper class
• **Plebes:** lower class
• **Pinks:** clones
• **Teleportation buckle** (When a Pink dies planetside, squadmates can activate their beacon, which will replace their expired body with a fresh new one): Beacon, Green Light, as in "Green-light him!"

## Characters

All PCs are members of the Zulu team combat unit, and have the following SFX available to them: Laser Guns 1/+2d

These are the Backgrounds for the players to use:

### Solomon
Jai-alai? Soccer? Roller Derby? You're a star. One of the biggest draws in the Roanoke sports leagues. Unlike your plebe teammates, you can pick and choose in which you want to participate. Gossip rags report a bit of a temper, others say you have a heart of gold.

### Morgan
People gravitate to you, even when you are on the silver screen. But truly you excel at one-in-one interactions; your fluency in all the major languages helps, but there is also just something about you. You've worked closely with the Council on numerous occasions helping them resolve delicate situations.

### Magdalena
Your choice of a date on your arm, vacations at the exclusive spas and resorts... life is good. Your handlers are always happy to help meet your every need. Sometimes, your dates want something more, but the choice is always yours. Those who have pressed the matter are dealt with.

### Francis
Sure, you could do something, but why? Everything you want is taken care of, no one misses the stuff you want and take. Of course, you have access to any of the soirees and locales, but isn't it more fun to sneak in? Having to register is always a pain.

# Season Two

## Pitch

*They fight not for survival, but for freedom!*

Something has gone wrong with the Pinkerton Initiative. The Pinks are now fighting to survive aboard a ravaged Earth and aboard the space station Roanoke.

## Intro

"You thought you had it made. Sign up for the Pinkerton Initiative, and be guaranteed fame and wealth for the rest of your life. But, something went wrong. And you began to remember the pain of these other lives, disposable existences you signed away. Now, you must continue to fight for survival, and you must free yourself from the shackles of servitude."

## Summary

Instead of being disposable, characters now must fight for their lives. The truth behind the war on Earth has been hinted at, and the atrocities of the Pinkerton Initiative have been uncovered.

### Showrunner Notes

This is the second season of Battleground: Homefront, included so that Showrunners can see how a Series can change from one Season to another. Anything not found here (e.g., Characters, Terminology, etc.) remain the same as Season One.

## Series Dials

**T**
- Anti-war protests
- Woman's Choice
- Save the earth/pollution
- Vietnam
- Free will
- Classism

**P**
(See Appendix 1)

**R**
- Seduction with soft-lighting
- Opulence (a gigantic swimming pool aboard the space station, a high society party)
- The War - planetside skirmishes.
- Strange Cities: a city of all women, a city of greasers straight out of the 1950s
- 70s era sporting event: jai-alai, soccer, roller derby, skateboarding
- Not being discovered aboard the Roanoke
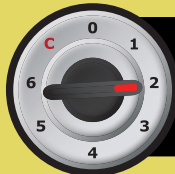
**C**
- Disco
- Communes
- Native American themes

**SFX**
- An enemy compound
- The Cloning Facility
- Laboratory
- Battlefield with tanks and aircraft
- Cros attempting to rebuild a spaceship
- An actor appearing with themselves on-screen.

## Intro

### Significant SCs
- *President Hecate: 4d*
- *Roanoke Security: 1d (SFX laser disruptors 1/+2d, stun grenades 1/+2d)*

### Style
- **Roanoke Security has classic sci-fi uniforms, tight pants, boots, earth tones, padded jackets.**

# EARTH ☐SQUARED

**Created by Shelly Bateman**

## Pitch

Humans from a future in which they were enslaved by aliens travel back to 1975 to fix history... but find themselves stranded. Worse, some of the evil aliens followed them, making the situation extremely dire.

## Summary

The year is 3215. The earth is all but depleted and humanity is hunted down by the mysterious and deadly aliens known as the Smiracks. They first appeared in the year 1975, tricking us into believing they were to be our allies who would help us unite the nations of the world so that we could live in times of peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, the Smiracks betrayed us and took everything, while using humans as slaves.

They began to experiment on humans, trying to blend our two species into a new, powerful race to keep us in line. While they succeeded in creating their powerful race of enforcers, they would soon find they were not so easily controlled. The Smiracks called their new pets "Wogs" and at first treated them wonderfully. They were told we were evil and sinful creatures who deserved to be punished.

After many, many years of being the watchdogs for the Smiracks and severely keeping us in line, they started to see that we were not what they had been told we were. Eventually, the Wogs began to question whether or not their Masters were correct in their assessment of us. When they began to question the judgment of the Smiracks, they became targeted for execution.

We stood up to the Smiracks and protected the Wogs, which culminated in World War 5. Seeing that the only ending to this war would be the total destruction of Earth, we created a think tank of super geniuses to help think of a plan B, so to speak. Our solution was to go back in time, before the Smiracks appeared, and give our ancestors information so that they could develop the means to destroy them before it was too late.

We had a mole in our ranks, however, and they told our captors of our plan to stop their reign of terror. As we were preparing our time machine, our secret compound was raided and our vessel damaged as it took off. There were five of us and one Wog, who renamed themselves the Protectons. So here we are, in the year 1975... with no way to return to our time and no way of knowing how many Smiracks followed us through the time portal.

Now, it's up to us to mend the future from here in the past. This comes with many obstacles. The authorities don't believe us, the technology available is crude... and then there's the Smiracks. This will be no easy task.

### Showrunner Notes

• *Earth Squared* is perfect for demonstrating the effects budget had on the shows of the 1970s. The whole reason for using "modern day" Earth as a setting in this Series is because the "producers" couldn't afford exotic sets.

• You might have noticed that this Series dœsn't have an Intro box. Not every Series will have one. Some will, others won't.

• On page 68, you can see a scene from this Series. Of particular interest is the way the special effects team made the Smiracks look so tall. The actor had a head/shoulder piece that fitted atop their shoulders, adding extra height. This created some strangeness with the arms, but when dealing with tight budgets, sometimes they just had to make do.

## Series Dials

**T** (dial set to 3)
- Man (or Woman) out of time
- Mistrust of the authorities
- Humans fear what they don't understand
- "Primitive" technology issues
- Corruption and abuse of power

**P** (dial set to 3)
(See Appendix 1)

**R** (dial set to 2)
- On the run from the Smiracks
- Unfortunate police intervention
- Shifting alliances
- Tracking down helpful gadgets
- New hideout needed
- Yet another Smirack character shows up from the future
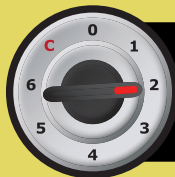
**C** (dial set to 2)
- Jive talk (usually played for humor because the future people can't translate it)
- Wah-pedal and hi-hat laden chase music
- Bell bottoms everywhere!

**SFX** (dial set to 2)
- Big slow-motion stunts
- Smirack technological doodads
- Creatures engineered by the Smiracks

## Details

### Significant SCs

- **Detective Glenn Beckett: 2d**
  Frustrated cop; the one guy on the police force who believes the PCs and wants to help them. Always tries to balance his sense of justice with keeping his job.
- **Lieutenant Cal Chatman: 2d**
  Beckett's superior who hates the PCs and thinks they are "wackos"; real hard-ass.
- **Maxxus: 3d** *(SFX mind control device 2/ +3d)*
  Enigmatic leader of the Smirack team sent back in time; evil to the core; let's his minions do most of the work; dresses in dark, regal attire
- **General Kryuxx: 2d** *(SFX neuroblaster 1/ +2d)*
  Maxxus's right-hand man; Cold, cunning and calculating; tall, even by Smirack standards; scarred face from explosion early in his military career.
- **Smirack Soldier: 1d** *(SFX laser pistols 1/ +2d)*

### Common SFX

- **Laser guns:** 1/+2d
- **Tanks, aircraft:** 2/+3d, 3/+4d

## Details (cont.)

### Style
- *1970s Humans:* contemporary '70s fashions
- *Future Humans and Protectons:* lots of terrycloth clothes, pretty utilitarian in nature. Mostly pastel colors and varying shades of purple.
- *Smiracks:* most of the Smiracks shown in the Series wear a military outfit, which consists of a silver, black or gold jumpsuit with one arm completely devoid of a sleeve.

### Terminology
- *Timeline Vessel:* the pod-like time machine the humans used to reach 1975.
- *Scramblers:* a derogatory slang for Smirack soldiers.
- *Vaped:* slang used by the future humans to describe being in deep trouble ("Uh-oh! It looks like we're vaped!").

## Characters

The PCs are the time-tossed humans who have to devise a way to keep the aliens from menacing the earth in the future. They have the following SFX available to them: Laser Pistols 1/+2d

These are the Backgrounds for the players to use:

### Braxton Ward
Handsome young soldier with a distinct David Cassidy look. He's brave to a fault; the word "brash" comes to mind. He may not have the experience older soldiers have, but he's extremely proficient in combat. Braxton has a particular weakness to the fairer sex, which sometimes leads to trouble.

### Thaddeus Mayfield
The prototypical distinguished-looking leader with mostly-gray hair. Never one to rush into anything without thinking it through first, Thaddeus always looks for a peaceful solution before resorting to violence. He's patient and speaks with conviction, sometimes bordering on being overdramatic.

### Tabirra Haas
This exotic dark-skinned woman of Mongolian heritage is a quiet and enigmatic bad-ass who specializes in fighting with her paired swords. She has a great sense of pride and honor. She views Thaddeus as a father figure and there's been some indication that their pasts tie together somehow.

### "Gizzy"
The Southern-fried tech expert. She's a pretty girl but tomboyish and socially awkward, fumbling with her words when she gets nervous. She lacks sophistication, but there's nothing she can't fix... except for the time machine. With her at all times is Moomoo, her mischievous pet spider monkey.

### Jonah Mayfield
Consummate straight-laced soldier and son of Thaddeus. Jonah often acts as the field leader on more action-oriented missions, often bickering with the foolhardy Braxton. He's mature, dutiful and by-the-book. He's also good at operating vehicles, even though he's having to adjust to the less sophisticated vehicles of the 1970s.

### Obul
This Protecton is a former slave of Maxxus and he bears the scars on his light-red skin to prove it. His good nature and humility make him an easy person to get along with. Stealth is his specialty and he can contort his body to fit into small spaces.

# Family NUCLEAR

Created by Barak Blackburn

## Pitch

After a horrific accident, a single father is given a choice: allow himself and his kids to die... or live and serve a shadowy government organization in their fight against international terrorists!

## Summary

Harold Christopher and his children were out in their single engine plane when it crash landed in the New Mexico desert. He awoke to find himself on an operating table. The glare of the white lights made it hard to see. A voice told him he had a second chance, a second chance for him and his son and daughter. They could be saved, but this miracle came at a cost. They had to work for the shadowy Odessa, traveling the world. With his children's lives on the line, this was no choice at all. Science has given them a second chance. But how will they cope with these new changes?

### Showrunner Notes
• The cybernetic abilities of the PCs are established by the Showrunner, but players are encouraged to try new things for one-time and permanent additions to the SFX available to them, see Chapter 5 (pages 52-55).

• Each episode was chock full of timely and relevant themes, this was pitched primarily as a family drama about a single father and a teenage daughter, but with a backdrop of scifi and exotic action across the globe.

• Most episodes saw Harold (Hal) attempting to date a pretty co-star and dealing with his teenage children.

## Series Dials

• Single parenthood        • Dating in the 1970s        • Teenage rebellion
• Current events (thinly veiled pastiches of "current" events: the oil crisis, endangered species, Soviet defections, Manson cult, first African-American Vogue cover model, first African-American Miss Universe, Three Mile Island, Iranian hostage crisis, Sioux Nation land claim, etc).
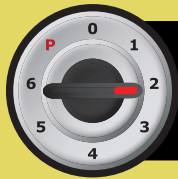
(See Appendix 1)

• Exotic locales (see Current events, under Thematic Dial)
• Single parenthood and dating
• Teenage rebellion
• Femme fatale, if on a mission

## Series Dials (cont.)

*In order to stay relevant, the show embraced any and all fashions and trends, even highlighting them in an Episode, from Pet Rocks and perms to disco.*

- PCs being worked on, showing their cybernetics in a stark white operating room.
- Field repairs of cybernetics.
- Opponents with cybernetics.
- Hi-tech, "computer" graphics!

## Characters

### Harold (Hal) Christopher

A former air force pilot and single dad, struggling to keep it together. After the death of his wife, he has been raising his daughter alone, giving up his job as a commercial airline pilot so he can stay at home, working as a pilot giving tours of local landmarks.

*SFX:*
- Cybernetic Arm 1/+2d
- Cybernetic Skin Grafts 1/+2d

### Andrea (Andi) Christopher

15 y.o., ranked junior tennis player as a child, lost interest when her life became a one-parent existence. Dealing with teenage rebellion and angst all the while trying to be a good sister to Robbie. Complicated relationship with Hal, but deep down you know he is trying his best.

*SFX:*
- Cybernetic Legs 1/+2d, Leaping 2/+3d
- Enhanced Reflexes 1/+2d

### Robbie Christopher

Smart-alec know-it-all 12 y.o., frequently getting into trouble, loves the espionage aspects of his new "job." Loves to embarrass his sister, but also knows how difficult all this is for her. Always working on schemes, either in the field, or at home, and sometimes they even work out.

*SFX:*
- Cybernetic Eyes 1/+2d, Scanning (Thermal, X-Ray, etc) lasts for more than one action 1/+2d
- Enhanced Adrenaline Boost 2/+3d
- Electronics Interface 1/+2d

### Showrunner Notes

This Series doesn't have a text box for Details, as there weren't any Significant SCs, all the Terminology and Styles consisted of what existed during the 1970s and the Common SFX can be found in Chapter 5.

# GALACTIC RUN

**Created by Barak Blackburn**

## Pitch

*Long-haul space pilots thwart the long arm of the government all the while living life in the fast lane!*

*Cannonball Run* meets *Smokey and the Bandit* meets *Convoy* in space. PCs are space truckers, fighting against a very oppressive government who wants to crack down on their transport. Why? Because runners frequently move product that is outside the law. Additionally, there is a big ol' scary sector of space that the government is very afraid of (think China in the early 1970s).

## Summary

Long ago, man went to the stars. With man came the need for governing. The politicians seized this new frontier and the opportunity to "do it right," and for many, the Intergalactic Council is a fine government. But, sometimes, individuals need something above and beyond what the Council allows. Enter the runners, pilots who transport goods across the galaxies, avoiding the strong-arm of the Peace Officers. They still compete with each other for the best cargœs, but at the end of each solar cycle, this loosely united band of outlaws always have each other's backs!

## Series Dials

- CB radio
- Big Brother
- Watergate
- Black power
- PTSD
- Unions
- Economic recession
- The war
- Fuel crisis
- Political relations with China
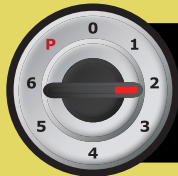
(See Appendix 1)

- Race with runners
- Chase
- Helping other runners
- Police blockade
- Strange planets*
- Transport of questionable goods
- Speed trap

* Examples: a planet with only women, a planet that resembles 1940s America, etc.)

- Disco
- Hippies
- Honky-tonk bar
- Commune
- Drug culture
- Sporting event
- Native American themes
- Orphaned child
- Outlaw music-themed guest star

- Robots
- Alien colony
- Failed jump

## Details

### Significant SCs

- *The Voice*
  > A never seen narrator/voice over the SF radio alerting everyone to PO and Jump Net sightings.
- *Lady Genova: 3d*
  > Crime lord and sometime ally of the runners, but not someone they want standing against them. Has frequent need for runner's services.
- *Sheriff Kellen: 2d*
  > The main recurring antagonist, strict, by-the-books, has a real ax to grind with the runners.
- *Former President Xonardi: 3d*
  > Disgraced former leader of the Council, ousted for some unethical maneuverings, but was also the one who suggested that the Council open up trade and relations with the Zhutan System.
- *President Jeffers: 3d*
  > New President. When Xonardi was ousted, Jeffers stepped up, a ruthless politician, hates the runners and everything they stand for.
- *Canimai: 1d*
- *Canimai Pack Leader: 3d*

### Common SFX

- *Blaster:* 1/+2d
- *Jumpnet:* 2/+3d
- *Leap:* 1/+2d (talons only!)

### Style

- *Runners:* jeans, t-shirts, padded jackets, pants tucked into boots, vests, vinyl, jumpsuits
- *Peace Officers:* nehru collars

### Terminology

- *Boxes:* a derogatory slang for robots
- *Canimai:* the "Mad Dogs"—alien race; muscular, aggressive, with fangs, pointed ears, hairy arms and hands (see below).
- *Jumpjackers:* hijackers
- *Jump net:* Peace Officer sting setup to catch illegal transport
- *Mad Dogs, or Canimai:* a pack-based society with the strongest (or most cunning) leading their pack. The packs are constantly fighting one another and anyone foolish enough to get in their way. In times past, because of their own inner contentiousness, they were not much of a threat, but in recent years that has changed. Someone has emerged who is unifying the packs under one rule. Their characteristics include muscular bodies, fangs, pointed ears, hairy hands and arms.
- *Plutos:* waystations à la truck stops
- *PO:* short for Peace Officer(s)
- *SF:* subspace transmitting frequency (think CB radio)
- *Talons:* alien race; known for their taloned hands, wing-covered arms, and single-color eyes
- *Zhutan System:* the China analogue; the Council does not trade with them, but will happily have them make goods at a fraction of the cost.

## Characters

The basic premise as presented is that each runner's rig has a pilot and co-pilot. The co-pilot serves as mechanic, gunner, negotiator, etc. It is not necessary that each rig has two personnel.

## Rig: The Comet

### Driver: Hale
Macho yet sensitive, outlaw spirit, tough guy, very anti-authority, honorable and loyal to your friends and all the runners, always sticks up for the little guy. Veteran of the war, but you'd rather not talk about it. You have a way with the ladies and definitive charm, roguish glint in your eye.
> **SFX:** Sawed-off Blaster 1d/+2d or 2/+3d

### Co-Pilot: Arrian
Thoughtful, quiet, you don't speak about where psychic powers come from. A deft negotiator, very interested in alternative lifestyles, but you share a secretive past with Hale that isn't spoken of. You're ferocious when cornered, and will do anything to protect and support Hale. Don't understand all social cues.
> **SFX:** Aura-Reading 1d/+2d; Psychic Blast 2d/+3d

## Rig: The Eclipse

### Driver: Big O
Tough, take-no-guff veteran of the world and multiple wars, but you always have a smile that can light up a room. Not afraid to throw the first or last punch, or beat feet as needed. Extensive connections across all levels of society. Not the fastest rig, but never underestimated.
> **SFX:** Holdout Pistol 1d/+2d; Room-Clearing Sweep Attack 2/+3d

### Co-Pilot: Red Feather
Most talons are content being distant, that is how they have always acted. But you wanted to see the universe and interact with the humans. If guiding mankind was your ancestors' goal, yours is to be part of it. You are not outcast from the talons, but also not embraced.
> **SFX:** Talon Strike 1/+2d; Leap/Glide 2/+3d

## Rig: The Pink Moon

### Driver: Helanna
They say it's a man's gig, but they ain't seen you before! Sexy, sassy, and full of surprises, and able to get places the blokes can't. Hale's got a thing for you, but the only thing he, or any runner, can get is a view of your exhaust ports!
> **SFX:** Pistol 1/+2d; Emergency Jet Boots 1/+2d; Censored Lighting 1/+2d

### Co-Pilot: Lu-Chen
The Council couldn't leave well enough alone, now you travel with the runners looking to bring a sense of justice so that there might be peace again. Sent forth from the monastery, yours has been a curious journey.
> **SFX:** Karate Chop 1/+2d; Super Leap 2/+3d

## Rig: The Refractor

### Driver: Quinton
Too young to be a pilot, but you built the refractor! Fast? Yup. But it's about being picking your moments. The other runners, forget the Peace Officers, couldn't even dream of what's under her hood. And if you can improve life for orphans like you, all the better.
> **SFX:** Ship Gadgets 1/+2d; EMP 2/+3d; Improvised Gadgets 1/+2d (only usable once)

### Co-Pilot: Archie
Quinton upgraded you, made you more than just the android you were programmed to be. As you've observed young Quinto and the rest of the runners, you understand more what it means to be human, and if you can help your brothers and sisters, you shall.
> **SFX:** Feat of Strength 1/+2d; Scan 1/+2d

# OUTPOST 2015

**Created by Barak Blackburn**

## Pitch

The American Frontier spirit transplanted to a harsh alien planet. *Little House on the Prairie...* in space!

The old meets the new! All the down home charm of a family drama, add in some dashes of sci-fi and Big Brother paranoia, and for good measure, why not throw in scantily clad natives and... Bigfoot!

## Summary

In the year 1989, Voyager 1 passed by Saturn and discovered the moon Janus. What was most remarkable about this was that due to a molten core, Janus actually had an atmosphere. The peoples of Earth united to send an exploratory shuttle to Janus, to explore, and perhaps colonize. But, we were not the first to call Janus home. The life of a colonist can be unforgiving, but for those who have decided to stay, Janus is home. Can mankind cœxist with the Janusians, a mysterious race that appear human? And what of the monstrous dwellers deep in the wilderness?

## Series Dials

- Bigfoot
- Communes
- Nuclear power
- Women's rights
- "A new life"
- The environment
- New Age Mysticism
- Computers
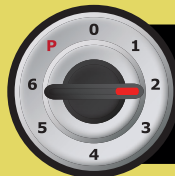
(See Appendix 1)

- Yeti attack
- Running low on supplies
- Farming or hunting
- Trip to town
- Harsh weather*
- Intra-colonist conflict
- Technology vs. a simpler life

* Examples: drastic temperature drop, violent storm, flooding, etc.)

- Disco in town
- Folk music
- Crystals
- Alternative lifestyle colonists

- Spaceship landing
- Yetis
- Ancient hi-tech gear
- Natural disasters
- Hidden hi-tech government technologies
- Hi-tech hunting apparatus (energy nets, infrared scopes, etc)
- Alternative energy sources (solar, nuclear, hydro power, etc.)
- Animals that look like earth animals, but different*

* e.g., a deer with bright red eyes. Usually these were shot from a distance, and only close-up did the SFX department need to do some work. It is hinted at that some of this animal population was brought in by the government to help Janus become more habitable.

## Details

### Significant SCs
- **Tommy Easton: 2d**
    The local Chrome Star, a good man, fair and just.
- **Cyrus and Maggie Whitson: 2d**
    Owners of the general store, very tough negotiators.
- **Roughnecks: 1d** *(armed with Blaster rifles or pistols, see SFX)*
- **Janusian: 1d** *(though see SFX)*
- **Yeti: 3d**

### Common SFX
- **Blaster rifle or pistol:** 1/+2d
- **Hi-tech secret government technologies:** 1/+2d, 2/+3d *(Requires a Thought Intent to utilize)*

### JanusianSFX:
- **Commune with nature:** 1/+2d
- **Infravision:** 1/+2d
- **Great strength:** 1/+2d
- **Heightened senses:** 1/+2d
- **Psychic link:** 1/+2d

### Yeti SFX:
**Feat of strength:** 1/+2d or 2/+3d *(often involved ripping a tree out of the ground and swinging it around)*
**Deafening roar:** 1/+2d
**Surprisingly fast:** 1/+2d

### Style
- **Settlers:** frontier America meets 1970s sci-fi—simple clothing, but with a futuristic edge. Earth tones and chrome!
- **Janusians:** more primitive attire, fur and leather based.

### Terminology
- **Roughnecks:** workers sent to help set up the infrastructure
- **Outpost Patrol (OP):** small police/military force
- **Ye-Ti:** Bigfoot, yetis, the monsters that are just beyond society. This was their territory first.
- **Chrome Star:** the local law, equivalent to an Old West sheriff

## Characters

Showrunners are encouraged to use just these brief Backgrounds until the players elect their characters. Full Backgrounds are located in Appendix 1.

### Landon Brooks
Sensitive and masculine, excited about the new frontier, scientist who volunteered to colonize

### Melissa (Missy) Carey
Landon's wife, a strong-willed woman who fell deeply in love with Landon.

### Xana
Janusian who befriended Landon and Missy when they arrived.

### Martin Russ
Reclusive mountain man.

# SPACE REJECTS

**Created by Cynthia Celeste Miller**

## Pitch

Everybody loves a good underdog story and if there ever was an underdog story, this would be it. After the deaths of the famous and illustrious heroes of the Terra Defense Force at the hands of alien invaders, the outcasts, slackers and rebels find themselves positioned as humanity's last chance for survival.

## Summary

Five years ago, in the year 2206, a heavily-armed race of robotic fiends calling themselves the Mekaxis descended upon the human race in a single-minded quest to extinguish it from the galaxy. The Terra Defense Force battled valiantly, but was fighting a losing battle against the mechanical conquerors. In what could only be described as a last-ditch effort to fend them off, the TDF set up an ambush using nearly all of the resources at its disposal. Despite drastically depleting the Mekaxis forces, the plan failed and in the wake of the battle, all of the TDF's major heroes had perished... all, that is, except one: Commander Ulysses Steadwell.

Steadwell resolved to do his best to regroup and continue his quest to destroy the Mekaxis. Unfortunately, he had two factors working against him. First, time was of the essence; the weakened robots were forced to temporarily retreat and weld their wounds, but it wouldn't be long before they mounted their next attack. Second, almost all the elite soldiers were killed in the battle, leaving second and third-stringers for him to work with. He had to scrape the bottom of the barrel to create anything that even remotely resembled a competent fighting force. Can these misfits step up to the plate and succeed where the others failed?

## Series Dials

- Paranoia about technology replacing good ole manpower (an analog to the concerns about the Japanese auto industry)
- People coming together despite their differences
- Staying in school
- Taking pride in domestic products as opposed to imports

(See Appendix 1)

- Shootout with Mekaxis
- Characters reminded that they are the *Space Rejects* (i.e. the bottom of the barrel)
- Expository scene where one or more of the PCs is failing horribly at something; often this failure would need to be turned to success later for the finale (it might be Milton trying to show his intellect and failing horribly, or Boom Boom blowing something up that should not have blown up. Remember these are the Rejects for a reason)
- Comedic scene involving one or more of the characters
- Appearance by Varka and Varkus

## Series Dials (cont.)
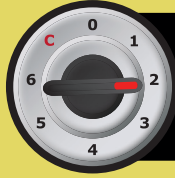
- Pet Rocks
- Portable radios and 8-track tape players
- Wannabe teen idol guest stars, often performing one of their hits
- Disco vs. rock and roll
- Roller skating
- Mood rings

- Mekaxis manufacturing
- Space flight
- Strange new alien culture/planet
- Firefight with laser weapons
- Flashback scene of former TDF skirmish

## Details

### Significant SCs

- *Relith: 3d*

  Mekaxis Emperor; massive humanoid robot who stands seven feet tall. He is more hands-on than most master villains in the 1970s sci-fi TV shows.

- *Varka and Varkus: 3d*

  Enigmatic bounty hunters, clad in cloaks, cowls, and metal armor. Their race is a mystery. They are both cold and calculating; Relith hires them often.

- *Commander Ulysses Steadwell: 3d*

  New leader of the Terra Defense Force. He's a grizzled veteran, whose uniform has the feel of a General in the American Civil War. A real hard-ass and sometimes has little patience when the PCs screw up.

- *Zarky: 1d*

  Was a badly-abused janitorial bot created by the Mekaxis who defected after being dumped into a trash compactor. His obsession with cleanliness can be grating.

- *Mekaxis Troopers: 1d*
- *Mekaxis Elite Troopers: 2d*
- *TDF Soldiers: 1d*

### Common SFX

- *Laser guns:* 1/+2d
- *Starships:* 2/+3d

### Style

- *TDF:* stock uniforms (loose-fitting jumpsuits in varying tones of gray, with chest insignia to denote rank). The PCs, however, are special cases and tend to wear completely distinctive clothes, as befitting their personalities. For the most part, their attire looks like 1970s-era clothes with a few futuristic flourishes.
- *Mekaxis:* They're robots and don't wear clothes; you can see what the elite troopers look like on page 68.

### Terminology

- **Battle of Eden:** the battle that nearly wiped the TDF out. It took place in the Eden System.
- **Burgs:** slang term for planets.
- **Crates:** a slang term for Mekaxis spaceships.
- **Mekaxis:** The alien robots seeking to destroy humanity.
- **Spaceways:** established routes through space for ships to travel.
- **TDF:** Terra Defense Force, the military arm in charge of protecting humanity.
- **Tin Cans:** a derogatory term for Mekaxis troopers, especially the low-end versions.

## Characters

The PCs are members of an special task force within the TDF. They have the following SFX available to them: Laser Pistols 1/+2d. This is in addition to any SFX specific to certain characters.

### Morton Marz

You serve as the team's field general, despite being in a wheelchair (albeit a wheelchair with lots of gadgets on it). You're well-spoken, quick-thinking and have a good grasp of tactics.

    **SFX:** Gizmo-laden Wheelchair 1d/+2d

### Sissy Blaine

You are the stereotypical sexy, blond airhead, but you sure can handle a laser gun! Just don't try to think too hard. You're impossible to dislike, though, because you have such a kind heart and are willing to do anything if it means ridding the universe of the Mekaxis.

    **SFX:** "Callie" (Customized Laser Rifle) 2/+3d

### "Boom Boom" Zamboni

If something needs to be blown up real good, yopu're the one to call! There's only one problem: unless explosives are involved, you're a total klutz. Your clumsiness often tends to help you in combat as well, by sheer dumb luck. You're a street-tough New New York girl (yes, you read that right—*New* New York), so it takes a lot to put you down for the count.

    **SFX:** Explosives 2/+3d

### Milton Drexler

There's no other way to put it: you're a nerd to the point of being cliche. Your genius IQ dœsn't translate to social skills, unfortunately. It's not that you're unlikeable; it's just that you always manage to find the wrong things to say, making yourself look like a total doofus.

    **SFX:** Wrist Computer 1d/+2d

### "Red" O'Haire

There's "grumpy" and then there's *"grumpy"*... and you are definitely *grumpy*! You're also something of a slob; your spaceship, "Trashpile" (an apt moniker if there ever was one), is always such a cluttered mess. That said, your piloting skills are top-notch!

    **SFX:** "Trashpile" (Modified Freighter Ship) 1d/+2d

# WarpCruise76

Created by Norbert Franz

## Pitch

Cruises at sea are a prestigious and popular diversion. Just image a few centuries in the future, instead of going to the Caribbean or Samoa, or an island in the Mediterranean Sea, people could simply book a luxury vacation, seeing other worlds light-years away, moons and planets, and there would even be artificial "pleasure planets", and space stations that are giant casinos and restaurants! Not enough fun for you? What if we told you that the crew of the cruise spaceship are all former Earth Defense Forces officers? And their old life won't let go off them... just when you think they could get a normal day on board.

## Intro

"In the future, humankind has settled on many planets across the galaxy, achieving phenomenal advances in science and civilization. But that means that all those hard-working people of the space age also have to take a vacation from time to time--and there are so many sights to see. Those with a big enough wallet like to book a cruise across the milky way, aboard a ship built for luxuries and entertainment. In the competitive race against other cruise lines, the Omega-9 crew aims to please, making your space vacation unforgettable... offering you the best WarpCruise!"

## Summary

The Great Interstellar War ended about 20 Earth years ago. The armistice decided then enabled the peoples of the galaxy to transition to a thriving era of new trade, understanding, discovery, and rebuilding what was once destroyed. The great battleships of old are but a memory, they are dismantled or sitting in vast space museums. Fighting and austerities have given way to people just wanting to live their lives in peace, earning some money, raising families, and having a little something to enjoy from time to time. The once struggling colonists on a hundred different worlds have been able to transform themselves into an affluent middle class. And all those people working jobs, improving themselves, keeping their home lives together, also look for something nice to do on their vacation every now and then. Some are looking for those interesting new sights to see on far-away planets, some are looking for love and romance, some are just feeling downright adventurous... this is when they can buy their passage on an interstellar cruise liner, including the ship Omega-9.

Of course, all is not fun and games aboard the Omega-9. What the average passenger does not know is that this ship used to see action as a fighting vessel in a hundred space battles, and was repurposed for civilian space travel. The hard-working crew is comprised of former special forces officers and operatives, currently not assigned to or paid by the Earth Defense Forces, but with the chance to be reactivated for duty any time if Earth's government needs them. For the time being, they are happily working as purser, barkeep, cruise director, doctor, health and fitness advisor, first mate, and captain of a cruise spaceship, run by their own private company, Rigellia Voyages, Inc.

The captain has assured his crew many times that their travels with the Omega-9 are actual cruises, not a front for military activities or espionage. They actually have jobs for the cruise company, and are there to let other people – passengers from various planets and moons – enjoy their vacation time. Yet every time they think it is going to be smooth flight, an adventure seems to be around the corner. Old foes and rivals from their military days pop up seemingly at random; someone on board is really under cover; criminals and fraudsters appear to have a penchant for embarking on the ship, and things can take unexpected turns once the Omega-9 reaches a seemingly harmless space port for tourists: Suddenly, the crew are faced with brutal space pirates, mutants, outcasts, newly discovered life-forms ("Honey, that was no ordinary cactus you bought at the duty-free shop! "), or sometimes their most persistent opponent of all: spies and saboteurs from their evil rival Metrocruise Enterprises, who would gladly see the oddballs from the struggling Rigellia Voyages run out of the business.

## Series Dials

**T** (dial)
- Human hubris
- Competing travel agencies
- Advertising and corporate politics
- Excessive wealth and decadence
- Military personnel turned civilian
- Sexual revolution and women's lib

**P** (dial)
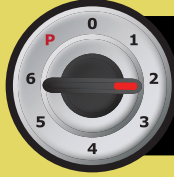
(See Appendix 1)

**R** (dial)
- The old ballroom scene
- Gambling
- Unnecessarily long and verbose dinner table talk
- Strange stowaways
- Somebody has a new admirer or lover who can't let go
- Confusion due to twins / cross-dressers / shapeshifting alien
- Recreational drug use
- Robot or A.I. has a sudden "revelation" (and humans don't get it)
- Sight-seeing flight aboard the shuttlecraft

**C** (dial)
- Poolside swimsuit scene
- Dated humor
- Everyone is participating in a new sport or dance class
- The "traditional Earth folk dance" is totally disco!

**SFX** (dial)
- Colorful nebula formation
- The Omega-9 ballroom
- Spectacular spaceport shot
- Cruise ship take-off and landing sequence
- Planet with three suns, dual moons, etc.
- Asteroid field

## Details

### Significant SCs

**• Aunt Betty: 2d**

Elisabeth Mulholland is the captain's very old and very wealthy aunt, a resident of the exquisite Vega-6 colony. Her bank accounts and obscure connections often help out Rigellia Voyages, but she also has demands and requests regarding the routes and furnishings of the ship. She is never on screen, but often mentioned in conversation. She always sends telegrams or coded express messages, and is sometimes heard as a voice in a phone call, always demanding to speak to the captain.

**• Petunia Grady: 3d**

A powerful businesswoman who Perry Sholano almost married at one point in his younger years, she now runs the rival organization Metrocruise Enterprises. She only appears on communicator screens or in separate scenes planetside. Her aim is a de-facto monopoly on the Terran space cruise business.

**• Dr. Lloyd Chambers: 2d**

Metrocruise's second-in-command, a seasoned socialite with an unscrupulous personality. Born into wealth, very arrogant. For him, there is always some more money to be made somehow.

**• General G.Q. Morgan: 2d**

Morgan was Peregrin Sholano's commander in the Great Interstellar War, which ended two decades ago. Well-connected and not convinced that this cruise business is going to last long, he would love to get Sholano and his crew to carry out covert missions for the government again.

## Details (cont.)

- **Space Pirates: 1d**
  Just what their name suggests! Pirates still roam several areas of the sector. Interestingly, many of the cruise tourists think of them as characters from quaint folk stories...
- **Barnardian Shapechangers: 1d**
  A small and fading race, known as providing the best spies in the galaxy, but also actors and other artists. Barnardians are neither friendly nor openly hostile.
- **Commercial Ship Inspector: 1d**
  They form the majority of the Omega-9 crew's recurring antagonists. Utterly humorless, utterly by-the-book bureaucrats who have to ensure the cruise ship conforms to the space travel authority's countless standards and regulations. Sometimes disguised as normal passengers.
- **Spaceport Control Authority (S.C.A.) Agents: 1d**
- **Spaceport Police Officers: 0d**
- **Nosy Random Passenger: 0d**

## Common SFX

- **Blaster Pistol:** 1/+2d
- **Small Civilian Shuttle:** 1/+2d
- **Warp Transfer:** 2/+3d
- **Orbital Flight Sequence:** 2/+3d
- **Marauder Ship:** 1/+2d *(a medium-sized rugged space frigate only used by pirates)*

## Style

- **Cruise Ship Crew:** white and silver 70s sci-fi with hints of American naval and airline uniforms, often with blue and red stripes (crew members while on duty)
- **Passengers:** futuristic chic, bell-bottoms, disco collars
- **Pirates:** colorful silk and cotton clothing, baggy shirts, headbands and bandannas
- **Spaceport Police:** mainly black-clad police officers with hardly anything futuristic

## Terminology

- **Donut:** a donut-shaped, rotating giant space station. On *WarpCruise-76*, most such stations were ports for cruise ships for refueling and restocking. Some were also giant tollbooths, some were casinos and hotels.
- **Goldmoon:** a small moon or planetoid used as a casino, usually with its own legislation and government.
- **Junkmart:** a semi-legal spaceship junkyard set up on a remote, barely populated planet; often containing banned and restricted military surplus and decommissioned fighter-craft.
- **Life Pod, Biopod:** an emergency escape pod capable of limited space flight, holds 2-4 people.
- **Parasuit:** a combination of powered space suit, hang-glider and parachute. Operated by a single person. Very rarely shown on screen due to the limited SFX budget.
- **Pleasure Stretch:** the technology in the universe of *WarpCruise-76* did not usually permit a warp jump (faster-than-light jump) directly to the planet used as a holiday destination, so between exiting hyperspace and sending a shuttle full of tourists to the "port of call", there was a stretch of the voyage used to prepare for the shuttle flight, some snacks and drinks, and casual conversation... this pleasure stretch was often used to introduce subplots, supporting characters, and simply to prolong stories on board.
- **Retro-Ex Deck:** a deck of the ship furnished and decorated to resemble a long past historical era of Earth, including America of the 1930s, 50s, or 70s; there was a strange scene on a deck made to reflect the "faithfully recreated, fully authentic 1995," which viewers didn't get at the time. (Retro-ex stands for "retro experience".)
- **Wildworld:** A planet not directly under a formal government or colonist group; sometimes claimed by rival organizations, sometimes entirely unexplored. This was the sort of place that intelligent plants or weird furry creatures came from.

# Characters

The PCs are members of the core crew of the Omega-9 cruise ship, all handling multiple duties. They are also former officers of the special forces, and one has even worked as a spy. If the Showrunner wants to capitalize on the "crew member meets passenger" aspect of the show, one player in the group could easily play the part of the one-shot passenger.

Short Backgrounds and the characters' typical SFX are listed below:

### Captain Peregrin "Perry" Sholano
A matter-of-fact leader shaped by his many years in the military, you command the glorious Omega-9. You serve as vice-president of Rigellia Voyages, which you co-founded with your buddy Cedric Lumis and your aunt Betty. Your impeccable manners often conceal the fact that you used to be a hotshot pilot.
> **SFX:** Favorite Handgun 1/+2d; Space Goggles 1/+2d; Personalized Shuttle 2/+3d

### Rascal Thunders
Officially, you are the ship's chief purser, but since that primarily means a predictable desk job, it's never enough for you - a good-natured, yarn-spinning, jack-of-all-trades "people person." You want to be friends with everyone, always looking for action and excitement, and are surely in it for a good time.
> **SFX:** Blaster Pistol 1/+2d; Wingsuit 1/+2d; Interplanetary "Little Black Book" 3/+4d

### Jake Roosevelt
You are the ship's chipper barman doubling as mechanic, and can stand your ground fighting rampaging robots with a lead pipe or a baton. While stranded on a distant planet in war-time, you developed an unreliable "funky" psychic ability that occasionally supplants your easy-going personality. It makes you hear "voices."
> **SFX:** Psychic Voices 1/+2d; Electro-Baton 1/+2d; Overwhelming Psychic Visions 3/+4d

### Genevieve Jocelyn "Gee-Jay" McAlister
You're known as peppy, loyal, sweet-natured, slightly overzealous, a former "space army brat" who has been around this sector a few times. You worked tirelessly as a cosmo-showgirl to pay for your studies in business and interplanetary relations, and, after graduation, jumped at the chance to work aboard the Omega-9.
> **SFX:** A Dress for Every Planet 1/+2d; Slinky Costume 1/+2d; All-Knowing Clipboard 2/+3d

### Mahendra Chowdhury, M.D.
Known by your friends as simply "Doc", "Stitch", "Big M", or Mahendra, you are the ship's well-respected physician. There are few ailments of the human or vaguely humanoid body that are unknown to you. Though partially robotic, you are quite a ladies' man, owing to your exceptional charm.
> **SFX:** Portable Doctor's Kit 1/+2d; Medical Database 1/+2d; Bionic Left Arm 2/+3d

### VX-P32 "Vance", the Robot Emcee
You are a sparkly, slow-moving android built as a diplomatic aide – never mind that Rascal has also given you that concealed raygun for self-defense. You take yourself and your duties very seriously, and supervise all activities on the entertainment deck, especially when Gee-Jay and Jake sneak away to investigate mysteries.
> **SFX:** Clunky Box-Body 2/+3d; Concealable Raygun 1/+2d

### Showrunner Notes
Crossover time in space: *WarpCruise-76* series was produced by the same television company and production staff as *Galactic Run*. Though very different in tone and storytelling, many of the ships, costumes, and small props of the two series looked astoundingly similar, and by its third season, *WarpCruise-76* finally acknowledged that the *Galactic Run* runners existed in a shared fictional universe... Odd crossovers were developed from there. A handful of times, popular main characters from *Galactic Run* took a vacation on the Omega-9 cruise ship. Another time, *Galactic Run* characters like Canimai and POs appeared as passengers or extras at parties, gatherings, or in the background at a spaceport. The two series can also be easily linked at your gaming table, if you wish: Note that some of the *Galactic Run* characters had extended families as well as many interesting ex-spouses, ex-lovers, or army buddies, all of who could appear on the cruise ship for whatever reason.

The following Series Seeds are presented so that we can give readers some other exemples of ideas we wanted to be sure to illustrate. Some of the Dials are missing, which means you can look at them as incomplete, or you can look at them as un-finished and ready to be made your own. The Seeds are in various stages of com-pletion (e.g., only one series has a "Characters" section). So, for example, one *PSI Agents* Series might feel very different from another.
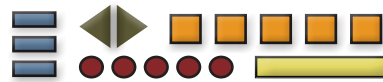
# 1985

**Created by Barak Blackburn**

## Pitch
A man wakes up and discovers that something about his life just isn't right. Everything seems normal, but anytime he opens a door he had never opened before, he discovers... a vast white room.

## Summary
Minimalist dystopian sci-fi. The set-up is always the same: the protagonist wakes up, his room is always left the same way and he journeys outside. Everything seems normal and seems the same, until he changes his routine. Upon discovering a white room, pursuit of him begins by the local constabulary. Every day, he hopes to evade them longer and discover the secrets of the white room.

### Showrunner Notes
This Series Seed is an example of a minimalist sci-fi setting and show with a small SFX budget.

## Dials
*(See Appendix 1 for Dials information)*
SFX: 1

"There's a very old saying: 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.' I never believed that... until now. I'm an old dog. It's too late for tricks."
— Commander Isaac Gampu (*Space Academy*)

# Eyes of the
# SPHINX

**Created by Barak Blackburn**

## Pitch
Classic pulp-style "lost world" adventures. Naga in rubber suits!

## Summary
Archeologist Dr. Kevin Marcus and Scientist Dr. Liz Shields, along with their pilot and tour-guide, Cole Westland, were investigating the Great Pyramids when they unearthed something never before seen. They were not expecting to hear other beings inside the long-sealed catacombs. Captured, they found themselves in ancient lands, where the snake-like Naga serve those seen as gods, their ancient spacecraft high above the populace. Now they fight to survive, as they work to find a way home.

## Dials
### Thematic 1
• Chariots of the Gods
• Women's Lib/ ERA

### Plot 1
*(See Appendix 1)*

### Recurring 6
• Almost find a way home
• Gladiatorial combat
• Uncover a hint of connection to the modern world

### Cheese 1
In hindsight, Series like this were the epitome of cheese, with the rubber suits and recycled sets, in *Retrostar* terms, this Series might even have a Cheese Dial of 0. There is nothing particularly disco-like about the Series, but, as Showrunner, of course, you might view things differently, through.... THE EYES OF THE SPHINX!

### SFX 3
• Ancient looking space ships (think Egyptian meets Incan stone ships)

## Showrunner Notes
This Series Seed serves to illustrate how a Series can have SFX, without the PCs having any hi-tech gizmos available to them. Initially, the PCs should not have any assigned SFX, though they can use the 3 SFX points on a straight 1/+1d value. This 1-1 cost is to encourage them to develop their own SFX appropriate to their character, or perhaps for some alien technology to fall into their hands, even just for a one-shot (1 Episode) use item.

Also, gladiatorial fights were commonplace, with one or more of the PCs getting dragged from the streets to fight for the amusement of the populace. This is a perfect reason to use the Opposed Intentions rules (see page 57). The Showrunner will need to write up the opposing characters, although some might be as simple as:

<u>Kassik (Naga pit warrior)</u>
• *Adventure: 1* (Great Strength)
• *Thought: 0*
• *Drama: -1* (Naga of few words)

*Background:* Armed with a wicked-looking spear
*Casting:* Former college football lineman in a rubber costume, not particularly fast, but very strong.

# PSI Agents

Created by Barak Blackburn

## Pitch

*Superpowered agents and superspies investigate unexplained phenomena.*

PCs are agents of PSI (Paranormal Scientific Intelligence), tasked with investigating all the stuff that Leonard Nimoy might have gone in search of. Of course, they will come across similarly powered opponents.

**Side Note:** The use of PSI and not having psionic type effects is intentional, and a meta reference to some anachronistic naming trends of the 1970s.

### Showrunner Notes

This Series Seed is used primarily to illustrate some different applications of SFX. Some brief elements of the Series are included, but it is a high-SFX Series with '70s style superpowered individuals. One Background is written, so that a Showrunner might see how a Background could also be used with Spotlight Tokens to gain some effects hinting at SFX.

## Summary

Low-powered superpowered characters and superspies look into weird stuff (*In Search Of* meets *The X-Files* meets *James Bond*).

## Dials

**Plot 1**
*(See Appendix 1)*

**SFX 6**
• Ancient looking space ships (think Egyptian meets Incan stone ships)

## Characters

**Agent Mercury, the speedster**
    • Superspeed 2/+3d    • Burst of Speed 1/+2d

**Agent Heimdall, optical powers**
    • Optic Blasts 2/+3d    • Nightvision 1/+2d
    • Optical Sensors 1/+2d (see pages 53-54 for usage suggestions) (can be X-Ray Vision, thermal scans, carbon dating, etc).

**Agent Crow, Australian superspy**
    • Spy Gadgets 1/+2d    • Hi-Tech Gadgets 1/+2d    • Cultural Assimilation 1/+2d

**Agent Nike, female brick**
Anything a man can do, you can do better. The team brick, able to punch through a concrete wall, but no slouch in the looks department! College cheerleader and pre-med student, astronaut for some top-secret test flights, now able to see the world and make it safe for all people.
    • Super-Strength 1/+2d    • Leaping 1/+2d    • Superleap 2/+3d    • Heightened Toughness 1/+2d

# Example of Play

I'm running an Episode of *Galactic Run* for Cynthia and Norbert.

Cynthia will be playing Helanna, pilot of the Pink Moon, while Norbert will be playing Big O, pilot and proprietor of The Eclipse.

## HELANNA

### ADVENTURE
**0**

### THOUGHT
**0**

### DRAMA
**1** ▲ Social Chameleon

### SFX
Pistol 1/+2d; Emergency Jet Boots 1/+2d; Censored Lighting 1/+2d

**Background:** They say it's a man's gig, but they ain't seen you before! Sexy, sassy, and full of surprises, and able to get places the blokes can't. Hale's got a thing for you, but the only thing he, or any Runner, can get, is a view of your exhaust ports!

**Casting:** Raven-haired, very sexy swimsuit model, sparkling green eyes, scar by her left eye, sultry yet sassy, slight Southern accent.

## Big O

### ADVENTURE
**1** ▲ Mountain of a Man

### THOUGHT
**1** ▲ Seen it All

### DRAMA
**-1** ▲ Brusque

### SFX
Holdout Pistol 1d/+2d; Room-Clearing Sweep Attack 2/+3d

**Background:** Tough, take-no-guff veteran of the world and multiple wars, but always has a smile that can light up a room. Not afraid to throw the first or last punch, or beat feet as needed. Extensive connections across all levels of society. Not the fastest rig, but never underestimated.

**Casting:** Large African-American, former NFL player and Rhodes Scholar, intense eyes, deep voice, hearty laugh, protective of the weak and innocent, affinity with animals and children.

To prepare for this Episode, I roll Dials dice:

### Example Results

| Roll: | Dial: | Dial present in this Episode? |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Thematic | Yes |
| 4 | Plot | No |
| 3 | Recurring | Yes |
| 2 | Cheese | Yes |
| 6 | SFX | No |

This is an episode early in the Series, so players have not personalized their Dials. Recurring is not a surprise, given the rating of 5. Thematic and Cheese will also definitively be present.

Reminder: Not rolling a Dial for an Episode dœs not mean it cannot be included. The Dials serve as a very broad outline for a Showrunner.

I definitely want to start with a race between two runners, as that is recurring, but also to showcase and illustrate how the Opposing Intentions work (see page 57).

The example that follows covers the entirety of Act 1 of the Episode. This should give you a very good idea of how the game flows.

Let's get rolling!

*For this Episode of Galactic Run, the 2 players will have 5 Spotlight Tokens available to them. The Showrunner has a SFX pool equal to: 2x4= 8*

**SHOWRUNNER:** Pre-credits, the episode starts in the middle of a high-speed run. Big O and Helanna are on a run, being pursued by at least one PO, and The Voice begins bringing everyone up to speed.

**THE VOICE:** *The Voice here, and the action today is coming to us from Sector 7. It looks like Helanna and Big O are on a run, and the PO ain't none too happy to see them. It's high speed, high action, and high time for the two of them to lose the PO. If anyone out there knows anything, you know how to get in touch with me. I am, of course, the Voice and I appreciate you tuning in as we are right in the middle of another... Galactic Run.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** You are indeed in the middle of a run. The winner gets significantly more money than the loser, that is all I will say for now. I am going to need an Opposed Intent from each of you (see page 57)—most likely Adventure—and with a 1 die Obstacle, from the heat of the PO on your tail.

> **Showrunner Notes**
> A 1d Obstacle is not insignificant, given what I rolled for Dials for this Episode, and given only two of the Stars being "on-screen" this Episode, I am thinking it might be amusing if one (or both) of them failed to finish this run. It opens up some interesting possibilities.

> In addition to the dice roll graphics, you'll see something called the Intent Tracker after each Intent is made. This is important because players may collectively only make 12 Intents per Act.

**HELANNA:** *Alright, smoky, it's time to eat my space dust!*

**CYNTHIA:** I got a 4, 5 and 5.

Intent Tracker

1
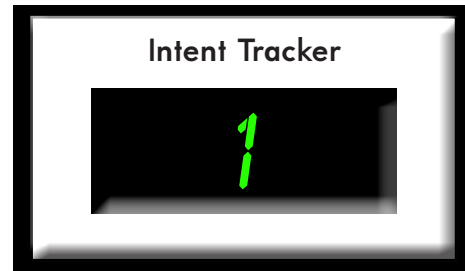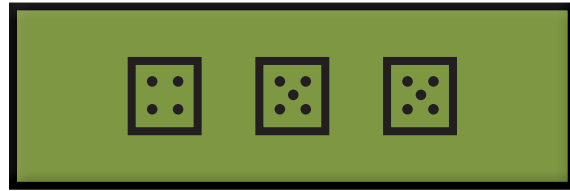
**SHOWRUNNER:** Cynthia, you will keep the 4 and the 5, because of the 1d Obstacle. Big O?

**NORBERT:** Big O has a tight grip on the controls of his rig. My dice results are also a 4 and a 5. What happens now?

Intent Tracker

2
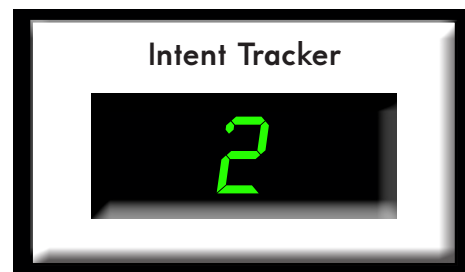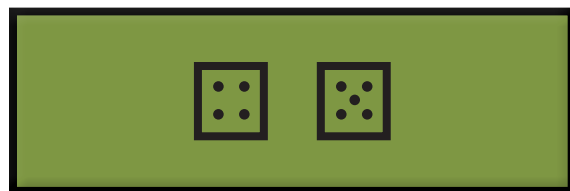
**SHOWRUNNER:** Big O, you were using Adventure, I assume? Both of your results were in the 7-9 range, and in an opposed contest (see page 57), this means you both suffer an additional 1d Obstacle and the conflict—in this case, the race—continues.

**SHOWRUNNER:** You both put the pedal to the metal, and eager to beat each other, put yourself in a worse situation as the PO is hot on your tail. So, I need additional rolls from both of you, this time with a total Obstacle of 2d... 1d for the PO and 1d for the conflict resolution. Don't forget, you can use SFX and/or Spotlight Tokens, but this also just the 1st Act, so manage those resources wisely.

**THE VOICE:** *The PO is hot on the trail of Helanna and Big O; these two can't catch a break. Stay tuned, all you groovy galactic citizens, because you know The Voice has you covered.*

**NORBERT:** Okay, this is getting very interesting, very fast... I like it.

**BIG O:** *This stretch is getting more demanding, and we've got a PO sitting almost on our bumpers... I hope I can put some mojo into this next move!*

**NORBERT:** I want to use Adventure again, ranked 1, but with a 2d Obstacle, I would be rolling 3 dice and keeping the worst 2. I am going to offset that by spending a big ol' shiny Spotlight Token. That brings me back to rolling 3d6 with a Benefit.

**SHOWRUNNER:** What are you Spotlighting?

**NORBERT:** I'm spotlighting something from my Background. I was thinking "veteran of the world and multiple wars"... Is that doable? If he has been in multiple wars, he will have had to drive or fly fast before, shaking off pursuers.

> CURRENTLY SPOTLIGHTING:
> "VETERAN OF THE WORLD AND MULTIPLE WARS"

**NORBERT:** Big O's second roll is 3, 5, 6. Keeping the best two, I have a 5+6=11! Yahoo! This looks top-notch.



> **Intent Tracker**
>
> **3**
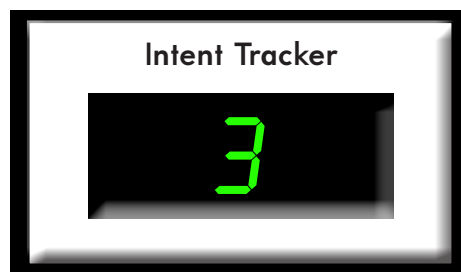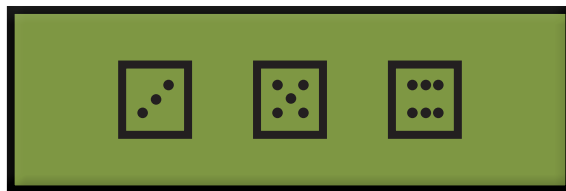
**SHOWRUNNER:** Makes perfect sense. You've been through this kind of chase before!

Helanna? He is going to get top billing this episode, with the use of a Spotlight Token. With the 2d Obstacle, you would be rolling 4d and keeping the worst 2. If you also were to spend a Spotlight Token, you would be rolling 2 and keeping them. However, together, you would have only 3 Tokens remaining for the rest of the Episode.

**CYNTHIA:** There's no way I'm letting Big O get one over on Helanna. I'm using my own Spotlight Token as well. I'll highlight the "sassy" aspect of her Background. To that end, she picks up the SF and prepares to show that attitude to Big O...

> CURRENTLY SPOTLIGHTING:
> "SASSY"

**HELANNA:** *Got your ears on, Big O? Because I want the last thing you hear before I blow your doors off to be the sound of my thrusters! See ya on the flip-side, slow poke.*

**CYNTHIA:** I'm using Adventure, which is 0. So, I'm rolling my 2 dice... a 2 and a 4. She's not

going to be blowing ANYBODY'S doors off with a roll like that. Ha!





Intent Tracker

4
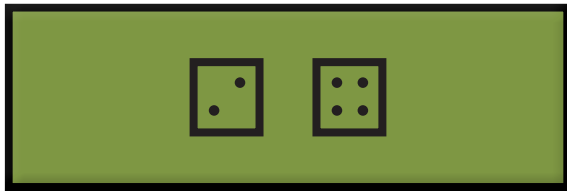
**SHOWRUNNER:** So, based on the chart, Big O succeeds; now Helanna, with that roll of 6, you are going to not succeed, and as a matter of fact, it will be an epic fail.

**HELANNA:** *Dagnabbit! I knew I should have changed that energy coupling before it burned out on me! [hits the dashboard console in frustration]*

Big O, your experience in chases like this has indeed served you well, as you are able to shake off not only the PO but Helanna as well. You pull into the location Lady Genova gave you and wait. After some time, several space-dock workers begin unloading your shipment, motioning for you to stand back.

> **Showrunner Notes**
> Helanna is out of the picture for now. I will get to her in a moment, and I have now introduced Lady Genova, a 3d SC; not a woman to be trifled with. Hopefully, this ramps up the tension.

**HENCHMEN:** *Cool your jets big guy, Ms. Geno-va will be down soon enough, we're just waiting for the other shipment, and gonna start unloading this.*

**NORBERT:** All right, things are moving along.

**BIG O:** *(thinking to himself) What am I going to do here, actually? Just stand around watching? They are handling the cargo professionally, aren't they?*

**NORBERT:** You know what? I want to take a long hard look at the henchmen. Do I notice anything unusual or raising my suspicion? That could easily happen, especially with this veteran character. I'd like to use Thought, at 1 for Big O, "Seen It All".

**SHOWRUNNER:** They are handling the cargo professionally, yes. The only thing you notice is that it has been quite a while and Helanna has still not showed up. As you look at your galactic chronometer, the red LED glows on screen and you hear a woman's voice.

**NORBERT:** No dice roll necessary?

**SHOWRUNNER:** Nope. Lady Genova has shown up, just as you begin to suspect something is off.

**LADY GENOVA:** *Big O, so nice to see you.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** She walks over and hands you a large envelope, stuffed full.

**LADY GENOVA:** *As promised, your fee. Now, when your co-runner shows, she can get what is coming to her.*

**BIG O:** *Right-o. Thanks for that, Lady.*

He tucks the envelope into a zippered leather pocket.

*I'm expecting Helanna here very shortly. She seemed to be facing engine troubles, but nothing she can't get straightened out on the double.*

**LADY GENOVA (looking impatient):** *Well, the good thing is that each of you was carrying half the cargo; useless divided, but very important to me as a whole. I do hope you are*

*right, however. Because, if she did do something stupid and got herself caught... that would be most unacceptable. (she squints slightly). I have grown weary of waiting. Big O, if you would like to supplement that 10,000 credit payday, if you can deliver the second cargo, I would be happy to double the loser's fee, upping it 2,000 credits. Helanna of course, has failed me, and that brings with it a price all its own. Is the Big O interested?*

**SHOWRUNNER:** End Scene, intro credits roll. After the commercial break, we open on Helanna, in PO custody.

SCENE

A Nameless PO is inspecting the Pink Moon's cargo bay.

**NAMELESS PO:** *Nothing much to see here, just some... (he produces a large vial of bright green liquid) green goo.*

**PO SGT:** *Helanna, whatever were you in such a rush for? I don't happen to see any papers documenting your cargo. I am sure this was an oversight. Perhaps if we called your departure dock, they could confirm that your cargo was all on the up-and-up... unless, of course, you were evading me because your cargo was, shall we say, less than legal.*

**HELANNA:** *Less than legal? See, I was under the impression that this here stuff was ingredients for a soda pop. But if we can, you know, just forget this little mishap ever took place and I could be on my merry way with my soda pop ingredients, I could... make it well worth your time, Sergeant. Maybe we could meet up at the Chrome Briar tomorrow night for a few drinks.*

**CYNTHIA:** Would my "Social Chameleon" be of help here?

**SHOWRUNNER:** It would indeed. You can talk the talk, you know your way through some of

the bureaucratic red tape lingo, and maybe you can charm him. However, if you want to make this a Drama Intent, you get a 1d benefit from your Trait value, and this is just a normal opponent, which is a 0d Obstacle, so you would roll 3d and keep the best 2, without spending the Spotlight Token.

**CYNTHIA:** Considering that Helanna's professional reputation is at stake here, I think I'll go for the Drama Intent, but no Spotlight Token.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Roll those dice!

**CYNTHIA:** Sweet! I rolled a 2, a 5 and a 6! Much better than my last roll!



Intent Tracker

5

**SHOWRUNNER:** Much better indeed.

**SGT PO (motioning to the PO in the cargo hold):** *Be careful with that stuff... it's soda pop, you know, for the kids. (to Helanna). I would greatly enjoy something other than pop to quench my thirst, maybe 22 Thirty, at the Chrome Briar. I am sure I can find a copy of the appropriate papers for you and bring them with me.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** So, here is the situation: he is offering to bring you some forged papers. He is in your pocket... all you have to do is meet him for a drink. However, if you do, you will be very late for delivery, and it is a delivery Lady Genova after all.

**HELANNA:** *Can our little rendezvous wait until after I get these bottles delivered? You see, these soda pop makers tend to get mighty fussy when their cargo is late. I can throw in a bit of extra special fun in return for your... tolerance for my situation. A lady's gotta make a livin', you know. (winks at him)*

**SHOWRUNNER:** Interesting. You could have just taken off, you know. I am going to, if you want to pull this off, consider this a second Drama Intent, after all, he totally bought into the charm, but know, well, you are leaving him hanging, stood up if you will. Helanna promised one thing and then changed that offer. If you want to not make the roll, let me know and I will respond accordingly. And if you want to think about, I can go back to the Big O. And, if you want, just for giggles, I will give you a free usage of Censored Lighting SFX, maybe you ask him to help you change before you go?

> **Showrunner Notes**
> Helanna is playing up her sex appeal, and SFX are what viewers tune in for, in this case SFX are her in very scanty states of dress and undress perhaps, so, it pushes the story in a very interesting direction should she decide to do this, and I think of name for this Sgt, and perhaps I have a new SC. I am offering up a suggestion, the player can choose to take it or not, but even if they choose not to, I have planted the seed of an idea.

**NORBERT:** Helanna is such a wily minx here. This is good entertainment. I hope our viewers agree...

**CYNTHIA:** I'm thinking long-term ally here, which will make Helanna's professional life a lot easier in the future if the PO Sergeant is smitten with her due to greasing the wheels, so to speak.

**SHOWRUNNER (chuckles):** So to speak indeed.

**CYNTHIA:** As for the second Drama Intent, sure, why not? The "Censored Lighting" idea sounds fun as well, so let's roll with it.

**SHOWRUNNER:** That is 1d for your Drama, plus 2d for "Censored Lighting" so you will roll 5d with Benefit, keeping the best 2!

```
SFX IN USE:
"CENSORED LIGHTING"
```

**CYNTHIA:** Okay, here goes! A 2, 3, 3, 4 and 6. That gives me a 10, all told, since I keep the two highest results.

**Intent Tracker**

**6**
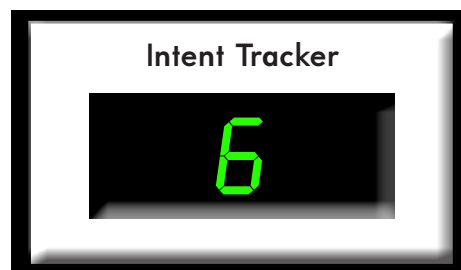
**SHOWRUNNER:** With a roll of 10, he is putty in your hands.

**HELANNA:** *Just because we have ourselves a little arrangement it doesn't mean that I shouldn't be frisked to make sure that I'm not carrying anything illegal on my person. After all, you're a man of the law and shouldn't leave any stones unturned. If you catch my drift.*

**SGT JOHNS:** *(motioning to the PO still looking through the cargo) Officer Ericks, I think we are good here. Nothing to see but soda pop, can you go get me some delivery papers?*

**SHOWRUNNER:** Officer Ericks exits the cargo hold and nods, leaving to get the papers.

**SGT JOHNS:** *Well, I do have a sworn duty. I wouldn't want to put my professional career at risk.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** Sgt. Johns gets up and locks the door behind Officer Ericks and as he turns back to Helanna, we see her bare back as her jumpsuit falls to her waist, and this ends the Scene.

> **Showrunner Notes**
> Things are taking a very interesting turn here. I had very little prepared for this Episode, and now that the First Act is half over, I can use this to my advantage, but I need to introduce some sort of problem. I review the Dials I rolled, and have some ideas. Don't touch that dial!

SCENE

**SHOWRUNNER:** Big O, we are back to you on the docks. An electronic alarm sounds. Lady Genova reaches to her belt and picks up her communicator.

**LADY GENOVA:** *Yes. (pause) Yes. (pause) Thank you. (she closes the communicator.) So, Big O, I am sorry to rescind my offer, but it seems my delivery is on the way. And as much as I appreciated your compliance and possible willingness to assist me securing the second cargo, I believe our business is finished. If you wish, you may wait for your fellow runner at the Pluto nearby, tell the waitress you are there as my guest; you should find that the bill will be picked up. And be sure to try the Lunar Ale, it is especially tasty.*

**NORBERT:** I nod and head on my way.

**SHOWRUNNER:** You make your way across the space dock. Several of the dockworkers look up, but continue about their business. The Pluto isn't far from the dock, maybe a 5 minute walk. The manufactured atmosphere isn't too stale, but you can tell this is not a well known dock, certainly not on any of the main trade routes, and the buildings you pass are mainly warehouses. You see the crackling neon of the Pluto ahead "Zap's Grill" is the name of this not-so-fine establishment.

> **Showrunner Notes**
> Recall that in Act 1, a problem has to be introduced, and the characters try to solve this problem (see ch 7). I realize now what this problem will be!

**NORBERT:** I'll saunter in and take a look around, before making eye contact with the waitress. As I sit my large frame down at the counter, glancing around as I do, I hold up one finger. "Lunar ale," I order in my deepest voice.

**SHOWRUNNER:** The waitress nods and steps behind the counter, pouring you a cold one.

**BIG O:** *Lady Genova said to put it on her tab.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** The waitress smiles. "In that case..." she dumps your ale into a much larger mug and fills it up, the foam pouring over the side as she slides it over to you. "let me know what else you need, sugar."

**NORBERT:** I nod slowly and take a very long sip, letting out a satisfying "ahhhhh" as I put the drink back down on the counter.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Helanna, you finally make your way to the spacedock. As you pull in, the dock foreman takes your papers and directs you to dock 17. The Pink Moon pulls in, and as you gather your belongings, your door is opened from the outside.

**CYNTHIA:** This is unusual?

**SHOWRUNNER:** Certainly.

**CYNTHIA:** I grab my piece, a worn-in heavy pistol that I keep under my seat, and point it out the door at whœver had the gall to touch the Pink Moon.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Your bring your pistol to aim, and have none other than Lady Genova in your sights. Lady Genova, the most powerful crime lord in the galaxy. As you hold your pistol steady, you know, somehow that likely there are more than one gun aimed at you right now.

**LADY GENOVA:** *Helanna, my dear, how nice of you to finally show up. She takes an envelope out and hands it you, offering you her hand to exit the Pink Moon. I would be honored if you would wait for me at Zap's Grill. Big O should be there; put it on my tab, and there is further business I would like to discuss with you.*

**CYNTHIA:** I look through the envelope.

**SHOWRUNNER:** 1,000 credits as agreed upon, for the second-place delivery.

**CYNTHIA:** I shove the envelope in my bag and...

**LADY GENOVA:** *I have to be good to my word, Helanna. Surely you understand, but this second job I have for you should pay significantly more, and because of your special connections, I have heard about, your expertise would be worth a very generous bonus, but you have my assurance, you and Big O shall both be very well compensated.*

**HELANNA:** *Zap's Grill, you say?*

**LADY GENOVA:** *(nods) Yes, that's correct.*

**HELANNA:** *I'm gonna fuel up. If you want to discuss business, I'll be there.*

**LADY GENOVA:** *Of that I am certain.*

**CYNTHIA:** I put my piece in the holster on my side and go to Zap's.

**SHOWRUNNER:** It's later, not as much activity down here at the dock. You see dockworkers unloading the Pink Moon as you walk to Zap's. You spot Big O at the counter, nursing his drink.

**BIG O:** *Helanna! (motioning to Helanna) The Lunar Ale is out of this world.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** Really?

**NORBERT:** I am embracing the cheese, my man.

**CYNTHIA:** Helanna walks over to the counter and grabs the drink, downing it without taking a break.

**HELANNA:** *I'll need another to tell you how good it is.*

**BIG O:** *Of course, Helanna.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** The waitress brings another one over for each of you and places them down. It is getting late and Zap's is filling up, as are the stomachs of the patrons, as it gets louder and darker, space outlaw music playing loud in the background.

**CYNTHIA:** I take a smaller sip this time, and look down at the ale.

**HELANNA:** *You want to make some more money?*

**SHOWRUNNER:** Before you can respond, Big O, a dirty hand grabs your shoulder. The camera pulls back and we see several of the shadier looking dockworkers from earlier, not the ones handling your cargo.

**DOCKWORKER 1:** *Money? I like the sound of that. I see you're drinking on the house. That's real nice. So, I guess you wouldn't mind making a small tariff payment to me and my boys.*

**NORBERT:** I turn my head slowly. As my muscles tense, my voice becomes low and very quiet.

**BIG O:** *I suggest you remove your hand from*

*me, and if there is a tariff to be paid, you wouldn't mind producing the proper paperwork.*

**SHOWRUNNER:** You see a second Dockworker, reaching for a pistol at his side.

**DOCKWORKER 1:** *There ain't no paperwork, this ain't the kind of tariff that requires paperwork.*

**NORBERT:** How many are there?

**SHOWRUNNER:** Three total that seem to be shaking you down.

**NORBERT:** I am considering using my room clearing sweep attack, but I get the feeling these guys are not so tough.

**CYNTHIA:** I look at Big O; we've done this before, so I give him a small, knowing nod.

**BIG O:** *My mistake. I have forgotten, must be this very tasty Lunar Ale.*

**NORBERT:** I reach into my jacket with one hand as I take a drink with the other as my muscles relax, and with surprising quickness, I am going to smash my mug of ale over his head.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Ha! I love it. These are just ordinary Dockworkers, so 0d, and that sounds like an Adventure Intent.

**NORBERT:** Sure does. I have Adventure 1. I rolled a 4, 5, 5, so keeping the best 2 because I have a Benefit, gives me a 10!

**Intent Tracker**

**7**
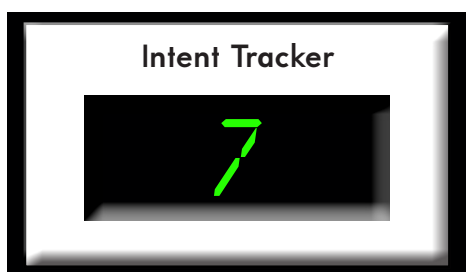
**SHOWRUNNER:** You smash the mug over his head, and he goes down hard. The one who was reaching for his piece starts to pull it out and back up while the other rushes at you, Big O!

**CYNTHIA:** I am guessing Drama wouldn't do too much here?

**SHOWRUNNER:** Maybe if Big O hadn't smashed one in the head, you could have tried.

**CYNTHIA:** I roll my eyes, signaling "here we go again" and take out my pistol, holding it so I can pistol whip the one drawing his weapon. I roll 2 dice: 2 and 6, for a total of 8!

**Intent Tracker**

**8**
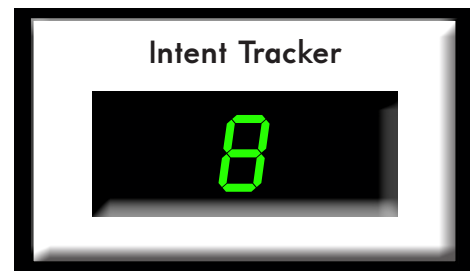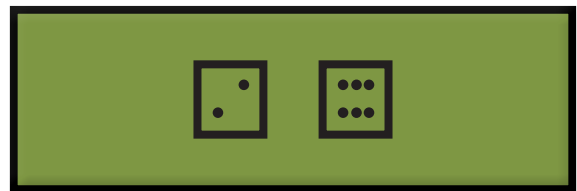
**SHOWRUNNER:** Ok, I will give you a choice: standard rules or reboot rules (see page 47). Either you fail and maintain control of your character, or succeed and cede control of your character OR you fail and empower Big O, giving him a 2d Benefit, or succeed and give Big O a 2d Obstacle.

**CYNTHIA:** Hell yeah! I was going to have her succeed no matter what, but now I can do it in style. I am going to give Big O an Obstacle.

**NORBERT:** Thanks so much.

**CYNTHIA:** [chuckling] No problem, I like to think that a challenge brings out the best in us.

SHOWRUNNER: Calm down, runners. Save it for the runs. Helanna, you pistol whip the dockworker as he draws his pistol, taking him down and as you back up, you bump into Big O, knocking him off balance.

NORBERT: Ok, very well. I could use a Spotlight Token here, as I am a "Mountain of a Man," or I could use my SFX and really unleash the hurt. Screw it, I am going to use a Spotlight Token; less for you later, Cynthia.

```
CURRENTLY SPOTLIGHTING:
  "MOUNTAIN OF A MAN"
```

CYNTHIA: Fair enough, but that'll be less for you later too.

NORBERT: That is very true. But the dice have been cast. Adventure 1, and the 2d Benefit for the Spotlight Token offsets the 2d Obstacle penalty, so I am still rolling three dice: 2, 2, 2, for a total of 4.

**Intent Tracker**

**9**
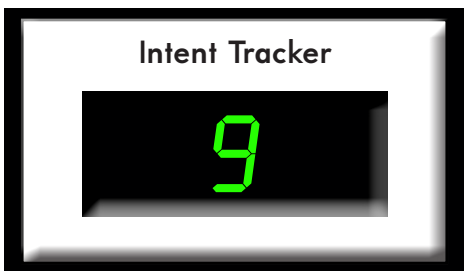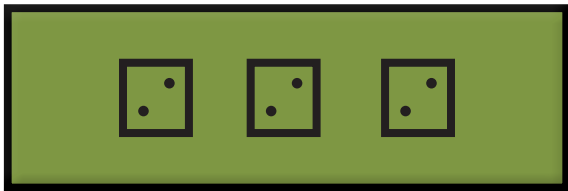
CYNTHIA: Oh, crap!

SHOWRUNNER: NIce try, Big O. You push yourself up and lumber toward the dockworker who was coming at you and he picks up the stool you were sitting on and smashes you over the head. You go down. Helanna?

CYNTHIA: I look down at the dockworker I took out and then look down at Big O.

HELANNA: *Your call, cowboy. You can walk out of here and tell your roughneck pals how you took down the Big O... that might mean something, but if you get taken down by lil' ol' me, how is that gonna play out?*

CYNTHIA: I am going to use Drama to talk him down. Let's hope it works.

SHOWRUNNER: Excellent idea.

CYNTHIA: Drama of 1, I roll three dice: 1, 2, 6.

**Intent Tracker**

**10**
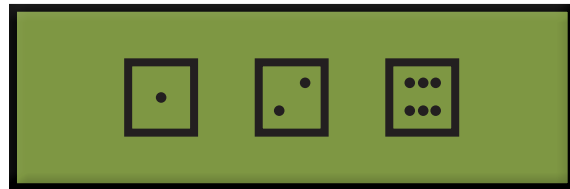
SHOWRUNNER: Fail and maintain control or succeed and cede control?

CYNTHIA: Or..... Fail and give Big O a 2d Benefit or Succeed and give Big O a 2d Obstacle?

SHOWRUNNER: Sure, why not?

CYNTHIA: That's right. I am going to talk him down with a success and give Big O another 2d Obstacle. Sorry, Norbert.

NORBERT: Wonderful.

SHOWRUNNER: The dockworker looks like he dœsn't want to risk the chance of losing face and fumbles his gun and reholsters it before taking off.

**CYNTHIA:** That's right. I want to let everyone here know what went down. After all, a runner is only as good their reputation.

**SHOWRUNNER:** I suppose that is true. [hands Norbert an index card with a -2d printed on it, big and bold] Hold onto that Norbert, for your next Intent.

**NORBERT:** Thanks so much, Cynthia.

**CYNTHIA:** So, I want to make another Drama Intent, this time affecting everyone in the bar, telling them what happened and that Hellana of the Pink Moon is not to be messed with.

> **Showrunner Notes**
> This is wonderful, and I will mention to Cynthia after the game that if she wanted to use this as a Personal Dial, it would be very appropriate.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Ok, being that you are trying to affect multiples (see page 56), I will allow it, as a 2d Obstacle.

**CYNTHIA:** Hmmm....

**NORBERT:** Are you going to chicken out?

**CYNTHIA:** No, I'm using a Spotlight Token. I am "sexy, sassy, and full of surprises", after all. So, that will negate the Obstacle, and I will roll three dice.

> **CURRENTLY SPOTLIGHTING:**
> **"SEXY, SASSY AND FULL OF SURPRISES"**

**SHOWRUNNER:** Correct. Drama 1, with 2d Obstacle, and a 2d Benefit, you will roll three dice with Benefit.

> **Showrunner Notes**
> The players have used 4 of their 5 Spotlight Tokens for this Episode, but it has certainly been memorable!

**CYNTHIA:** 3, 4, 4: total of 8.

**Intent Tracker**

**11**
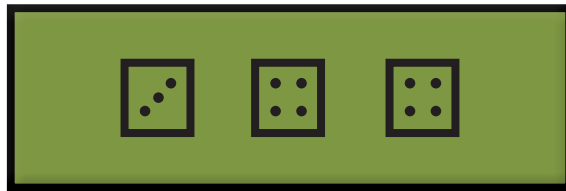
**SHOWRUNNER:** Don't even think about it.

**CYNTHIA:** Don't worry, I'm not going to pick on poor Big O this time. Instead, I'll succeed and cede control.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Make your speech.

**HELANNA:** *That's right! Run away, because no one should mess with Helanna and the Pink Moon when she is making a run. Tell your friends, tell your enemies, tell anyone who will listen!*

**SHOWRUNNER:** I am gonna stop you there, as you have ceded control, after all. I get to dictate the rest.

**CYNTHIA:** Fair enough.

**SHOWRUNNER:** The camera pulls back as the space outlaw music drowns out her voice. She walks around, humiliating as many patrons as she can—splashing their beers on them, getting in their faces and so on. She makes quite a commotion and this ends the Scene.

Next Scene! Helanna and Big O are at the spacedocks, as Genova's dockworkers close up your rigs, securing the cargo. Big O looks slightly bruised and battered, and Helanna is holding her head, obviously a bit too much Lunar Ale last night.

**LADY GENOVA:** *(to the both Big O and Helanna) I am sure that with Helanna's connection*

*with Sergeant Johns, you should not have any trouble docking and delivering your goods. Remember, no questions will be asked, your papers are all taken care of, and once you have delivered the cargo, I advise you to get as far away as you can as quickly as possible. And, Helanna, I was surprised you would accept no fee for this, aside from expenses, but I guess when one is as famous a runner as you, one always has their reputation which has more value than any credits I might give you.*

**CYNTHIA:** You have got to be kidding me!

**SHOWRUNNER:** Cede control, bad things happen. That's the way the game works.

**NORBERT:** Do I have an envelope?

**SHOWRUNNER:** You do, indeed.

**NORBERT:** I look inside...

**SHOWRUNNER:** 20,000 credits.

**BIG O:** *It is always a pleasure doing business with you, Lady Genova.*

**LADY GENOVA:** *And you, Big O.*

**CYNTHIA:** I'm holding my head and letting out a low moan as I climb aboard the Pink Moon.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Big O, you are not nearly as hung over and you power up the Eclipse and take off from the spacedock. Helanna, you are having some trouble shaking off your hangover, moving just a bit more slowly than usual. Lady Genova departs as you finally power-up the Pink Moon. As you're bemoaning your fate, you see the three dockworkers from last night charging towards the Pink Moon.

**DOCKWORKERS:** There she is!

**CYNTHIA:** Awww, man! Maybe I should have piled another 2d Obstacle on Big O after all.
**SHOWRUNNER:** We're gonna close out the Act in style. I am going to call this an Adventure Intent.

**CYNTHIA:** No, my big mouth got me into this, and my big mouth will get me out of this. I'd like to make a Drama Intent instead, if that's okay with you.

**SHOWRUNNER:** Alright, that makes sense to me. If you want to stop them all, I will not give you any Obstacles. They have the numbers, but you pistol-whipped one to the ground and made the other wet himself.

**CYNTHIA:** Wish me luck, Norbert.

**BIG O:** *Eat my exhaust, Helanna.*

**CYNTHIA:** I rolled just my Drama of 1, three dice: 2, 4, 5: total 9. I need to succeed.



**Intent Tracker**

**12**
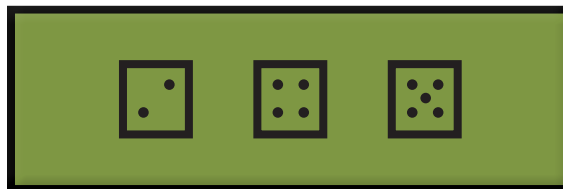
**SHOWRUNNER:** That would probably be your best bet.

**CYNTHIA:** Even though I'm sure I'll regret the repercussions, I will succeed and cede control. I'll get out of the Pink Moon, hands help up, as a gesture that I'm not armed.

**HELANNA:** *Gentleman, there seems to be a grievous misunderstanding...*

**SHOWRUNNER:** That seems like a perfect time to cut to commercial.

**CYNTHIA:** Are you serious?

**SHOWRUNNER:** Yup.

**Showrunner Notes**

And thus ends the first Act. Here is what I, as Showrunner knew: We would start out a race between the runners. This was a Recurring Scene for most Episodes of *Galactic Run.* I brought in a Honky Tonk and a barroom brawl for Cheese. I have not yet even touched upon Thematic:

- CB radio
- PTSD
- The war
- Big Brother
- Unions
- Fuel crisis
- Watergate
- Political relations with China
- Economic recession
- Black power

But I still have plenty of time. When Helanna failed, I was able to have her caught by the PO. Then Cynthia had Helanna take things in an unexpected direction. It was here I decided that what they had in the cargo hold was some kind of bad something-or-other that needed both parts to activate. Maybe a bomb. Half was with Big O and half was with Helanna; apart they were worthless and insignificant.

When the Sergeant acquired a name, I knew I had to use him again. So, now, the players must deliver this dangerous commodity back to the good Sergeant's territory and are tasked with leaving it there, no doubt for ill purposes. I will convey the evilness of the plan to the players as Act II moves on, and be sure to express that Sgt. Johns' career and possibly life might be forfeit, so now they have to decide whether they will stand up against Lady Genova or figure some way out of this situation. Lots of possibilities.

For Thematic, I might bring in PTSD, perhaps makes the Sergeant a fellow vet, to gain sympathy from Big O?

To open the Second Act, recall that Cynthia ceded control after she succeeded. What should I do with this? Maybe Helanna has now agreed to transport a second cargo for the three dockworkers, perhaps one of them needs to get some illicit goods delivered as well... I think I will start out the Act and not tell her what happened, and save it for a most inopportune time. A flashback can be a wonderful narrative tool.

As for that 2d Obstacle hanging over Big O, how can that be justified? If Adventure, he is still battered; if Thought, he is still shaken up; if Drama, his reputation has been sullied.

# Fiction is Failure

Most fiction is built on failure. Failure creates the compelling moments. The design of the mechanics of *Retrostar* were created to emulate this. Review the example of play: Big O failed. What happened? He went down. Rewatch any large number of TV shows and this is what happens: one hit, a character goes down. What about Helanna? She failed in her run? What happened? In the next Scene, she was in custody. It is not compelling to play out every move and counter-move. It can be a drag, and it takes up way too much time at the table... and frankly, a successive parade of dice rolls, trying to wear down an opponent's "Hit Points" or something similar, is not memorable.

Failure creates the compelling moments. Watching a television show where the protagonists succeeded all the time would most likely grow tiresome. It is the moments where the characters are fallible that we recall. It is the failures that drive a story.

Characters should not want to fail. Players should not calculate how many failures they can manage before all hope is lost.

Every failure counts. Every failure has the potential to change an Episode.

What about clumsy characters, you might ask? A character with an Adventure of -1 is at a dice-rolling Intention disadvantage. However, experience shows us that when the character is particularly "clumsy" in a Scene, interesting things can happen. So, "clumsy" can be used as a positive, IE a Spotlight Token, and one does not even need to use it with Adventure. The character will struggle enough having a -1 in Adventure—when their clumsiness shines through, this will be memorable.

What about ceding control? Is this not another type of failure? Again, refer to the example of play. Helanna succeeded, but at a cost. This cost didn't have any game effects, but it altered the story nonetheless. Because of the design of *Retrostar*, I frequently thought of the game in terms of the Showrunner and the cast. Ceding control is the fictional director of the Episode telling the actor they have to perform a specific action, even when the actor protests, saying their character would not do that. In this case, the director wins.

What about failure and maintaining control of a character? If Helanna had chosen to fail in the bar brawl, but maintained control of her character, she likely would have gone down, same as Big O, and then the next Scene would have been them waking up, perhaps with their wallets lighter. This creates a new type of tension, and sets up a new plot thread for the players to potentially pursue, or at least creates an adversary to hold a grudge against. But the character failed, they were able to lose at that particular action and suffer those consequences.

Failure creates the fiction in *Retrostar*.

# Advice and Discussion

## THE INTENTION OF RETROSTAR

One of the joys of many RPGs is that sense of randomness; this is usually accomplished using a randomizer, such as a die or dice. Game designer Ben Wœrner posited the following: "RPGs used to only think of two outcomes for Schrodinger's Cat, some now offer three outcomes. The truth is, there are five realities possible: Critical failure, failure, mixed results, success, critical success."

The Intention System is inspired by "the Apocalypse," D. Vincent Baker's *Apocalypse World* game engine that has led to the creation of many other cool games.

What many of the *World games do is make very granular the results of a die roll, embracing narrative control. In very clearly defining the limited options available to a player, players are forced to make interesting choices. Because of the very open-ended nature of *Retrostar* (i.e. no default setting), coming up with a laundry list of results inevitably seemed to be an exercise in failure: I could never cover all the ground I wanted, and I didn't want to limit the options available to players in terms of character concepts.

Additionally, with all the power in the hands of the players, mathematically, the system favored the players. I do not have a problem with this in theory, but crunching the numbers and considering results indicated it would not work well for what we were trying to do with *Retrostar*.

Because opponents don't get to act, players do the rolling, how dœs one manage that? I call this the Luthor Problem. In a fight, there is no way that Luthor can stand up to Superman. But, Luthor dœsn't fight in the traditional way. As an opponent he is more than a formidable fœ for Superman. How? Why?

And thus, the idea of adding and subtracting dice, Benefits and Obstacles, was born. Luthor would be at least a 4d Obstacle in *Retrostar*.

Back to Schrodinger and his Cat: As I studied 70s sci-fi, it became apparent that combat was not a long drawn out affair, as it can be in many RPGs, with rounds, and hit points, and feats and stunts. If we wanted to emulate this, we needed to think differently.

*Retrostar* moves away from the idea of conflict being a series of moves and counter moves, attacks and defenses, and pushes it towards resolution. But, in so doing, it limits the results more than Ben's example above, and puts at stake the one thing players care most about: control of their character.

Why did we do it this way? It has the potential to create incredibly compelling, gonzo, and memorable stories.

In many RPGs, the stakes are a character's health, likely in the form of hit points. But, a player can literally track this very specific resource. "I will walk through the wall of spinning razor blades, because I know that spell effect dœs X damage and I have greater than X Hit Points."

Add in the ability to heal this resource, and it can become more or less a bookkeeping game.

Now, lest anyone think I do not enjoy such games, allow me to add that the above example was from a game I played in, and it is a very fond memory. I have love for all sorts of RPGs, but with *Retrostar*, we wanted to try something different.

In *Retrostar*, a player puts at stake their character, and that character's actions. If the game is played adversarially, this could produce many hurt feelings, but if the Showrunner and players are all working together, it should create fun, compelling, interesting moments, and everyone at the game table will likely be surprised where the story goes.

It embraces more elements of improv than it does a game of poker where the quantity of chips is known and the rules never change.

### Narrative Control and Failure
The idea of a character having narrative control is relatively new in RPGs, and can lead to some sticky situations with players used to more traditional failure/success resolution mechanics. As players new to narrative control jump into a game, they can get more and more excited, and want to do more and more with each action. Of course, game designers have written rules to try to keep this from getting out of control. Most advice points to the use of AND, and if AND is used, it is more than one action. This can lead to situations with players min-maxing their verbal skills, avoiding the word AND and trying to narrate their actions in other ways.

"I want to assemble what I need to create a tactical nuke and set it so that..."

Note the use of *and*.

"I want to assemble a tactical nuke which will be set to activate when..."

So, as a game designer, I can look for ways to further explain how to avoid this situation, or I can avoid this situation.

Intentions and Time Management are two parts of our solution. *Retrostar* embraces the idea that one Intention can be more than one 6-second action.

"I want to assemble a tactical nuke that will be activated when the enemies enter the room, and will have a contained blast so that it detaches this portion of this ship, but we will have sealed the entries to other sections of the ship, and..."

As a Showrunner, I can appreciate the thought put into this plan. Because it is so detailed and complicated, I can either make it a very difficult Obstacle (4d? 5d?), or I can explain that creating and setting up the nuke will be a Thought Intent (3d), and that getting clear of the blast will be a second Intent.

I have not limited what the player wants to do, rather I have presented him with a couple choices, and said, "Sure, go for it."

And, if that player fails, or cedes control, then I get to step in.

Failure is failure, something goes wrong.

Loss of control might mean that the character is able to execute the plan very well, but has to hold shut the one door that was jammed, and the only way to hold it shut is to be on the blast side of the door.

Of course, that sounds awful, and if the nuke goes off the character will die.

Right?

That makes for compelling story, doesn't it? It makes for moment worthy of a commercial break.

And, as Showrunner, I describe the ship shaking when the blast goes off, with the one character on the unfortunate end of the blast. And of course, there is sadness at the table. The character couldn't possibly have lived.

And I continue the story, or perhaps the players change their plan, and now they have to find out what happened to their companion. I, of course, need to know what happened to the character, right?

Not yet.

I can let that player not do anything for a while, but this isn't time for them to take a break. They have to remain engaged. And move the story forward without that character.

Until I figure out what happened*, and how that character is still alive, and how being alive has complicated matters even more for the other players. Yes, there is the trust that I have not killed their character, but death is cheap and overrated as a punishment for failure. Make life more difficult for all the other players, or switch up the story and have it go in an unexpected direction.

To use the poker analogy, with every Intent, a player is "all-in." At stake is their character.

In terms of game design, this seems like an interesting way to tell a story. There are no dice rolls of attrition. No second attempts. You want to do something, do something.

Key to all of this, is the trust. Because we are embracing 70s sci-fi and all the baggage that comes with that, we are hoping that you and your players will as well. Everyone is working together, and at the same time, every player is hoping for that television periodical cover.

*The character found cover under; the character activated the transporter; the character is changed in some way from the blast; the character made their way to an emergency shuttle; the character found a space suit and made their way into the cold darkness of space; time travel; teleportation; etc. Episodic television is filled with these moments.

It's one thing to run an enjoyable game, but it's another thing entirely to run an enjoyable game that "feels" like the science fiction television shows of the 1970s. The game system itself goes to great lengths to capture the nuances of the source material, but in order to get the most out of it, you, the Showrunner, will need to implement all the tricks you can muster up. In this section, we present you with a slew of tips that are sure to give you a good foundation for staying true to the genre.

## Tip #1: Integrate the Special Effects

Don't miss an opportunity to reference the not-so-great special effects, especially for Series that have a low to moderate SFX rating. This reinforces the notion that this is a TV show with a limited budget rather than a game that pretends that everything around the characters is honest-to-gosh reality. It's a show and the players should be keenly aware of it, even though the characters themselves aren't.

"As you make your way through the obviously styrofoam cavern, you see three aliens feeding an imprisoned human, who is chained to the wall. The aliens have gray skin—clearly just body paint—and elongated ears. Their heads are adorned with what looks to be plastic versions of Roman helmets that cover most of their faces. They wear white togas and sandals."

The example above illustrates how such descriptions pull back the proverbial curtain and gives the players a glimpse of what's there.

The possibilities are infinite. If a character performs an acrobatic move, tell them the stunt double is at least twenty pounds heavier than the character and wears a terrible wig. Explain that the "space beam" looks suspiciously like a metal flashlight. That reptile beast the heroes are battling? It's just a gecko made to look huge with camera tricks. And how about that alien with a huge noggin that looks like a brain? Mention that "the viewer" can clearly see that it's a cheap-looking head attachment. Should the characters find themselves traveling by way of land vehicles, don't forget to bring up the fact that, in actuality, the "vehicles" aren't actually moving at all; after all, the background the vehicle is supposedly traveling past sure starts to look the same after a while. Hmmm.

Don't limit yourself to visuals though. Cheesy sound effects can be helpful as well. You can do it the old fashioned way by making the appropriate noises yourself or you can take the plunge into the 21st Century and use a tablet, smartphone or other device to play pre-set soundbites or audio clips on demand with the simple push of a button. It's not difficult to acquire a veritable library of sounds in this digital age.

## Savoring SFX

When you use SFX, savor it, and use points for your SFX pool if the SFX are being used as an Obstacle for the PCs. Every usage of SFX in a 70s sci-fi show was cause for pause. The SFX were for the benefit of the viewer, and your SFX should be the same, and shouldn't just be window dressing. For perspective, think of those movies about a war in the stars, and how often the brown robed fellows used their awesome light weapons. Compare that to the prequels of these films made much later when Hollywood SFX had come a long way. the "oh, that is awesome" moment became mundane. Don't let your SFX be mundane.
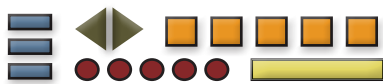
if they aren't paying much attention, these commercials will seep into their brains and enhance the experience in a subtle way. Finding appropriate commercials is a simple task, especially if you have internet access. YouTube and Daily Motion are your friends!

If your Series is supposed to be aimed at older audiences, you can play just about any commercials of the era. The sky's the limit! If your Series is meant to be kidvid, then look for toy and cereal commercials or even educational shorts ("Time for Timer" and "Schoolhouse Rock" are surefire winners!).

### Tip #2: Insert Commercial Breaks

Love 'em or hate 'em, commercials were (and still are) a part of the television experience. After an Act is concluded, announce that it's commercial break time. This gives everyone a chance to get up from the table, grab some snacks, run to the bathroom or just stretch their legs.

For added effect, you could play some actual commercials from the 1970s on your TV, laptop or tablet for everyone to enjoy. Even

### Tip #3: Use Era-Appropriate Dialogue

Nobody expects you to be an expert on 70s lingo, but do your best to have the SCs stick to language that was around during the 70s. Avoid modern expressions like the plague. If an SC says "like a boss" or "you got owned", it's going to pull everyone out of the 70s mindset.

On the other hand, don't overdo the 70s lingo unless it makes sense for the question. Too much of it will come across as being forced, especially if the Series is set in another era.

A character who says, "Let's boogie on down to my groovy pad so we can get away from all these jive turkey mo-fos, ya dig?" had jolly well better have a reason for it. An average person in the 70s didn't talk that way. Sprinkle it on lightly rather than without restraint.

## Tip #4: Keep it Snappy

The game system has a built-in mechanic for time management that involves limiting the number of Intentions the players can make per Act. But what happens if the players don't make Intentions, but bog down the Episode's pace with excessive dialogue and other pursuits that don't involve Intentions? Not that there's anything wrong with a healthy amount of these things, but let's face it: the sci-fi TV shows of the 1970s were tightly scripted so that the story moved forward almost constantly. The writers didn't have time to waste with pointless segments. Time was money. While time may not be money in *Retrostar*, though if you want to maintain the spirit of the source material, you need to treat the pacing as if it was.

If extraneous dialogue is the problem, simply ask the players what their characters are doing while speaking. Are they trying to fix the ship? Walking to the rendezvous point? Climbing that jagged cliff? If they're just standing around aimlessly while talking, spur them into action. Keep it moving along.

Potboiler novelist Raymond Chandler once published an essay called "The Simple Art of Murder". In it, he wrote, "When in doubt have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand". Sage advice to Showrunners with inactive or lollygagging players (even if Chandler didn't intend for it to be advice per se). If the PCs are lingering without direction, introduce an urgent story development that essentially shoves them out into the busy street! The building they're in catches on fire. The spaceship enters an unexpected asteroid field. A violent storm breaks out. Or, yes, a man comes through the door with a gun in his hand.

Another option is to pretend to be the director and tell the "actors" to keep the story moving. Explain that these shows kept everything rolling forward and since this game is based on them, they should follow suit. This almost always works, because players tend to be cool like that. Chances are, they just got wrapped up in the story (never a bad thing) and lost track of time. No biggie. It happens.

If the players persist, you can always start taking unused rolls away at a rate of one per minute that they dally. This is the last resort, to be sure, but sometimes it can't be helped.

## Tip #5: Utilize Cutscenes

Even though the PCs are the main characters of the story being told, they don't have to have the limelight all the time. They certainly didn't in the shows of the 70s. That's where cutscenes come in handy. A cutscene is a non-interactive scene that delivers exposition to the players, introduce plot twists, add depth to the Episode, foreshadow events to come or show what other characters are doing. They often (but not always) involve the villains.

To pull off a cutscene, simply narrate it, portraying all the SCs involved. This may take some getting used to, as you'll be talking to yourself in scenes that have dialogue. It seems weird, but it undoubtedly enhances the game and keeps the Episode true to the genre. The PCs aren't involved in a cutscene. If they *were*, it wouldn't be a cutscene... it would be a scene. It's also worth noting that the players are privy to the information doled out during a cutscene, not their PCs.

There are two major pitfalls that you should avoid at all costs. First pitfall: overly long cutscenes. Brevity is your friend. Nobody wants to sit through lengthy sequences that don't involve them, twiddling their thumbs out of boredom. Jump in, enact the cutscene in a brief manner and turn the spotlight back over to the PCs. Second pitfall: too many cutscenes.

If you drop a whole slew of cutscenes into an Episode, it will kill any impetus the story has gained; a constant state of start-stop-start-stop. A story can't gather any thrust that way. A good rule of thumb is to aim for no more than three per Episode. If they are short enough, you might get away with four.

## Tip #6: Don't Be Afraid to Split Up the PCs

There's an old axiom in RPGs saying that PCs shouldn't split up. There's some logic to that. After all, there's another old axiom about there being strength in numbers that holds true as well. This is all well and good, but anyone who has watched the science fiction TV shows of the 70s can tell you: the heroes split up a lot. And I do mean a *lot!*

As the Showrunner, you can and should devise ways to force the PCs to go off on their own or in smaller groups. The Commander gives them separate missions (that will likely be interconnected, whether they know it or not). A cave-in divides the PCs. An emergency breaks out that requires the talents of only one of the PCs. It's ridiculously easy to pull this off.

Splitting the PCs up allows for more diverse stories and creates interesting combinations of characters. Have fun with it! A doctor is needed to perform an emergency surgery, but the doctor PC is off trying to save a fellow crew-member elsewhere. Now, what are the two remaining PCs going to do? The team needs two characters who have knowledge of demolitions to board a docked enemy star freighter to make it explode. The catch? Those two characters despise each other and none of the other PCs can be spared to "babysit" them because they have to keep the bad guys busy while the explosives are set. Can they co-exist long enough to get the job done?

Cut back and forth between the various groups, but don't spend too much time on any given scene before switching back over to another one. Keep cutting back and forth regularly until the group is reunited or the Episode ends, whichever comes first.

## Tip #7: Create Interesting SCs

One of your jobs is to bring to life the setting your Series takes place in. One of the best ways to accomplish this is through the supporting cast. The PCs will be interacting with SCs quite a lot throughout the Series, so giving them intriguing characters to run into will make the whole affair a lot more vivid in the minds of the players. Forgettable SCs are okay and serve various functions well enough, but will the players remember their encounter(s) with them? That's the real question.

No one is suggesting that you should painstakingly flesh out SCs that the PCs are just going to ask for information or purchase an item from. But we are suggesting that you give such characters something that stands out, whether it's a mannerism, physical characteristic, vocal trait or whatever else you can dream up. If you watch the 1970s shows, you'll see that they almost always added something colorful to each character, no matter how insignificant the character is to the story's "big picture".

When it comes to recurring SCs, one little interesting tidbit won't suffice. You should dig a little deeper to bring the character to life. After all, the character may very well be showing up multiple times, so you'll want to give the players and their characters something to look forward to (or dread, in the case of villains). Think of these interesting aspects like the listings for a PC's Dials. By that, I mean that it helps to jot down (or keep a mental list of) a handful of facts that will set the SC apart from the rest. What makes them tick? Why are they worthy of having a sizable amount of screen time devoted to them? Why should the "viewers" care about them?

Particular care should be taken in this regard for master villains. Not all Series have a specific master villain and go with a "villain of the week" format. Either way, you're going to have to go that extra mile to construct villainous SCs that the players will want their characters to fight against, either for the entire Series

At the heart of *Retrostar* is the Intention System - Success; Failure; Control of your character.

SFX, Spotlight Tokens, Background, Casting, Time Management, Dials: all of these helped us at Spectrum make *Retrostar* do what we wanted.

But, this is your game now.

If you want to always allow a character to draw upon an appropriate Spotlight Token (if appropriate), if you want characters to have access to more SFX, if you want to ignore Time Management, if you want characters should have higher Traits, you can.

If you want Failure to be more granular, assign a 1d Obstacle after any failures, or allow only 4 failures per person.

We think the Intention System is the grooviest part of *Retrostar*, the heart, the game mechanic that drives the narrative. Make it your own. Whatever works best for you and your gaming group. It won't break.

or for a single Episode. They need a motivation, a personality, quirks, a marketable "look" or anything else you can drudge up to add some dimension.

With all that said, let's not go overboard. The villains found in the actual series of the 70s tended to be interesting, but not often overly complex. In fact, some of them felt downright underdeveloped in many ways. We're not talking Shakespeare here. Go for "intriguing" rather than "fully fleshed out" when creating master villains.

"We love freedom. We love independence. To feel, to question, to resist oppression."
— Commander Adama (*Battlestar Galactica*)

# APPENDIX ONE:
# Behind the Scenes

## SERIES NOTES

This appendix gives the Showrunner more details about all the Series and Series Seeds found in Chapter 8 (including data for the Plot Dials). This is information that is best kept away from the players and therefore is intended **for the Showrunner's eyes only!**

## FULL SERIES

## Battleground: HOMEFRONT
### Season One

Because of the disposable nature of the planetside Pinks, the Showrunner dœsn't need to worry about characters "dying." Instead, a Showrunner might instead be inclined to illustrate the brutality of the war by having this happen with some regularity. After all, another body will green light in.

Season 1 has been written from a very meta standpoint, in that the construction and dissemination of the plot embraces the nature of the RPG component. Primarily, this is because at no point in time is the Showrunner asking the players for their character(s) to ignore what they know. So, a planetside clone can act on information gained from their space station counterpart. If the players do not pick up on this, the Showrunner is encouraged to subtly point this out to them through gameplay. Any counterpart clones they run into will not share these fully realized memories.

This causal effect is the impetus for much of the plot of Season 1: SCs discovering that their two counterparts share memories, something the Roanoke Council and scientists was certain would not happen.

### Plots

With that out of the way, the following are other Plot elements the Showrunner should disseminate throughout the Episodes of Season 1:

• **A PC meets an "enemy" clone:** this could either be planetside or aboard the space station. Prolong the dramatic moment as much as possible, but a SC will run into another version of themselves, but this version is opposing them in some way. Obviously this should be significant, and the resolution of this moment is very much up to the Showrunner. The reason behind this is simple: there is not just one clone of each SC, there are many. To ramp things up even more, perhaps the group of SCs runs into an "enemy" party of their clones.

• **The pain of being cloned:** a SC wakes up screaming, or collapses at a fancy party, their mind filled with flashbacks, and alternate lives having been led.

• **An appearance by Dr. Rose:** Any appearance by this architect of cloning technology should be cause for dread, although aboard the space station, he will most likely be very cordial to the SCs, until he has a notion that something has gone wrong with the memories of SCs.

• **The war and how we are backing the wrong side:** The Cros are the oppressed peoples, they are fighting for their freedom, and they are fighting for the return of Earth to habitable conditions. The Roanoke Council and what it represents was responsible for defiling Gaia, and when people started to stand up against these heartless corporations, the war was started. The Council left Earth behind, and is hoping to eradicate the Cros so that they might return.

• **The clone storage facility:** a sinister place where there are many copies of each PC.

• **A PC meets their "birth family":** This could happen aboard the space station, perhaps the PC is recognized by a member of the lower caste, called a different name perhaps, or this recognition could occur planetside.

• **Why don't the Pinks remember their lives as a Plebe?**

• **Cloning/ medical ethics:** the malevolent powers of the Roanoke Council have been engaging in some very unscrupulous medical practices, namely, the harvesting of clones for personal betterment. Perhaps a PC discovers that an SC, when taking off their stylish sunglasses, has the same eyes as them.

• **The reverse engineering of the beacons:** If the beacons can ostensibly teleport new Pinks to the battlefield (and remove expired Pinks), surely the technology must be able to teleport from planetside to the space station. This moment and realization is a pivotal turning point for the Series, as once it is discovered how to do this, this will lead to a very different Season 2. If players come upon this idea too early in your Series, the solution is simple: make the task a very difficult Obstacle (-4d; -5d) until they do more research. It is possible figuring this out and perfecting it can be the crux of Season 1, but it is advised not to let the players be wholly successful until the end of the first season. If the players stumble upon this

idea early, do not hesitate to send other units of clone characters after them, embrace all this Series has to offer! The Showrunner might also decide to deactivate the beacons, thus requiring the planetside PCs to find other units, possibly of their counterpart clones.

## Character Notes

• Solomon is a sports star and grunt.

• Morgan is a movie star and communications expert.

• Magdalena is an escort, sought after by the richest and most attractive of suitors. When she is planetside, though, she is a birther. She is tasked with becoming pregnant by a Cro, so that the genetic material of the Cros might be examined, and perhaps those aboard the space station might be genetically modified for longer-term survival planetside.

• Francis is a celebrity, famous for being famous, as well as a combat grunt.



### Battleground: HOMEFRONT
#### Season Two

Season 2 brought with it some changes. The characters have figured out a way aboard the Roanoke, and now must deal with trying to stop the Council.

President Hecate is now a 4d SC, making her that much more difficult to oppose.

Note the Dials; many of the Themes were focused on in Season 1, whereas Season 2 is more about action. This manner of tinkering was not uncommon in the 70s shows, as a series struggled to find (and keep) its audience. This tinkering often led to drastic changes to the show.

## Plots

Although the Plot factors in more heavily, there are not as many Plot points to be covered:

• **Cloning:** PCs discover the extent of the cloning efforts.

• **The Next Batch:** A new group of clones (not based on the PCs)is introduced. These new clones will be bigger, stronger and faster, the result of genetic engineering. Give them all 1/+2d Enhanced Physiology SFX.

• **Truths:** PCs uncover what the real reason for leaving Earth was, and what the Far-Men are hoping to accomplish.

• **Teleportation Woes:** The Council, having seen that the PCs have reverse engineered the Beacon, develop mass teleportation devices, allowing them to send large squadrons of enhanced soldiers planetside.

• **Elimination Agenda:** The PCs and their clones have become too much of a problem, with their shared memories, and the Council enacts an extermination program. the problem is that many of the clones have become integral parts of the lives of the people who own them.

## Showrunner Notes

Characters will also have access to more SFX, as the SFX dial has changed.

And, a showrunner may very well decide to change the character backgrounds, now that the PCs know more of the truth, and how it has changed them. How it changes would be dependent on how the player interpreted the character, the Personal Dials, and what happened over the course of Season 1.

As an example:

### Francis (Season 1)

Sure, you could do something, but why? Everything you want is taken care of, no one misses the stuff you want and take. Of course, you have access to any of the soirees and locales, but isn't it more fun to sneak in, having to register is always a pain.

### Francis (Season 2)

Your family never wanted to give you up, your life as a plebe was not by choice. Ignored as one of the beautiful people, you now hope to destroy the council from within, showing them you are much more than a pretty face.
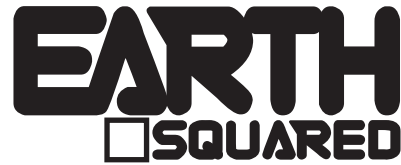


*Earth Squared* is an interesting hodgepodge of two genres. It has science fiction elements, obviously, but it also contains aspects of the 1970s "cop shows" with the inclusion of Detective Beckett and Lieutenant Chatman. It is primarily through these two characters (and a myriad of other one-shot police officers) that these aspects are carried forth.

Beckett did his best to help the "futurists" (as he often referred to the heroes as) in their struggles, even risking his career to do so at some points. Chatman, on the other hand, was Beckett's foil. He didn't believe the heroes were from the future and forbade Beckett from lending them his aid while on duty. These two characters played rather large roles in the Series. In fact, you might even allow one of the players to play Beckett as a PC instead of a futurist.

There was one question that was never really answered in the original Series. That question is: How did the Smirack's actually go back in time as well, considering that they weren't in the time machine with the heroes? Feel free to explain that away in any way that best fits the story should the topic arise. Perhaps they latched on to the time machine or leapt into the time tunnel that opened when the time machine roared into the past. It may never even come up during the game.

## Plots

As for the Plot Dial (in order of appearance in the Series):

• **First Impressions:** Detective Beckett stumbles upon the first clash between the herœs and the Smiracks, which is how he knows that the herœs are being honest about what's going on. He still can't convince Lieutenant Chatman that something strange is going on.

• **A place to hang their hats:** The herœs establish a "base of operation" in a secretive place (sewers, abandoned dance studio, the basement of an old house, etc.).

• **Red Blades:** Introduction of a pseudo street gang called the Red Blades. Despite their outward appearance, they are good kids who show up occasionally to provide assistance. The main members include Terry (the jive-talking leader with a conscience), Big Rig (a big bruiser who dresses like a trucker, including a "CAT Diesel Power" cap), Leilani (a tough-talking gal who is quick with a blade) and Purvis (a rich kid who slums with the gang and tries to blend in).

• **The Sleeper:** The herœs find out that one of them is an unwitting sleeper agent for the Smiracks. They will need to figure out which one it is and find a way to neutralize the problem without killing the character. This may require several Episodes to resolve.

• **Back from the future:** A previously unknown human character from the future named Cazzandra appears and claims that she has information about the Smiracks' plans here in 1975 (maybe she tips them off that the Smiracks have just about found a way to send for reinforcements; see below). Whether or not she's on the level is up to you, but either way, give the PCs reasons to alternately trust and mistrust her. Make them really wonder what her agenda is, if any.

• **The Cavalry:** The Smiracks signal for reinforcements from the future! Lieutenant Chatman finally sees the Smiracks for the first time. This event can lead to Season 2, which was never actually produced due to lack of budget and viewership. That dœsn't mean you can't forge ahead into new territory with your own version of the Series though! The second season is set up to introduce big changes, such as the possibility of a whole Smirack armada showing up for a full-on invasion or, at the very least, new villains to oppose the herœs; possibly even a much more powerful overlord to replace Maxxus.

# Family NUCLEAR

Given the Thematic Dial of 6, the Recurring Dial of 4, and the Plot Dial of 2, most Episodes had the Christopher's on a mission for Odessa. But some Episodes dealt with issues at home, be it problems at school or a new cause or problem for Andi or Hal.

## Plots

Plot is pretty straightforward, whenever the Plot Dial is present in an Episode, ensure that the Episode exposes some of the darker side of Odessa, and more often than not Hal will sacrifice his own ideals for the sake of his children and somehow they will be able to complete the mission on their own terms. But, Odessa is not above sending black vans, and immaculately dressed men wearing sunglasses after hal to remind him to stay on task. More than anything, Odessa has some motives that might be considered sinister, but given the leeway and freedom of their agents (Hal and Andy), they are also short-handed, so must acquiesce and adjust to whatever happens in the field.

Often, Hal, Robbie, and Andi would be delivered airline tickets and hotel accommodations, with little or no immediate instruction, their

mission becoming apparent upon arrival and immersion into their new location, or delivered at some point in the Episode. Some missions would include aliases for them, some would have them fend for themselves.

# GALACTIC RUN

There is a whole lot going on here, and much is hinted at and left for a Showrunner to develop, or not. Lu-Chen, the monk? Where does Lu-Chen come from, what of this monastery? Do with it what you will.

If sci-fi serves as a forum to comment on society, or ideas, using analogues, *Galactic Run* does that in spades. Masked as a fun outlaw music inspired sci-fi extravaganza, it can also serve as commentary on unions, trade relations with China, Nixon, Watergate, the 70s economy, etc., or it can just be a fun romp through space.

## Plots
In terms of the Plot Dial:

• *Galactic Conflict:* The Government is attacked, possibly a rebellion from within, or by external forces (Canimai? Zhutan? Robot Uprising?)

• *The Crackdown:* The Government is clamping down on runners, who they claim are hurting trade, increasing efforts to bring them down.

• *Canimai:* An appearance of the Canimai! Where are they from? What do they want?

# OUTPOST 2015

## Plots
Plot is not that significant in *Outpost 2015*, but there is more to the Series than just folksy messages.

• *Military might vs colonist freedoms:* There is a military presence on Janus, as the government has a vested interest in this colony. Many of the colonists came to *Outpost 2015* to return to a simpler time and to start anew. When the military starts poking their heads into their business, things can get ugly.

• *Janusians and yeti:* Janusians look human, but have available to them strange abilities. Additionally, the monsters in the woods appear, to all intents and purposes to be what are known as bigfoot. Is there an earth connection? This was heavily hinted at, but the Showrunner is encouraged to never fully resolve the connection between earth and Janus.

• *Lost contact with earth:* The government controls what supplies are sent to Janus, and when and who is sent to Janus to colonize. However, some supply shipments are lost, and some colonists never arrive. Is there something sinister in the stars? Communication with Earth is possible via long-range telegraph (reinforcing the Old West/ Frontier feel), and can take over a month. The party line by the government is that nothing has been lost, and everything is accounted for.

Colonists occasionally stumbled upon ancient hi-tech equipment, no doubt from the Janusions, some of it personal in size, some large scale. The Showrunner is encouraged to leave this as mysterious as possible, and let players speculate, is it teleportation equipment, communication equipment, FTL travel. Bring an aura of mystery and forgotten secrets to Janus.

Given Missy's Background, there are also hints of an even darker side of the government, play-

er and Showrunner can develop this as they wish, this is a great example of a player being able to bring something into the game through Personal Dials, so Missy's player might decide that government agents are trying to find and apprehend her aboard Janus, as an example.

## Character Notes
Below are the full character descriptions.

### Landon Brooks
One of earth's foremost scientific minds (specialization: biogenetics), volunteered and hand-picked for the Janus expedition, excited and eager to explore this new frontier. Not thrilled with the amount of oversight by the government and their possible motivations in regards to Janus. Deeply in love with Missy.

*SFX:*
• Blaster Rifle 1/+2d
• Improvised Gizmo 1/+2d

### Melissa (Missy) Carey
Strong willed, but reluctant to call upon your past. Disappearing was easy, it was what you were trained to do, working for the secret government organization. Janus is your chance to leave it behind, to start again with your husband, Landon. He is a good man.

*SFX:*
• Blaster Rifle 1/+2d
• Trained Assassin 1/+2d
• Karate 1/+2d

### Xana
Fiercely protective Janusian who has bonded with Landon and his wife, many Janusians have ill intentions towards the humans, but you mean them no harm. Janusians know the real terrors out there. Elders have told you nothing of the secrets hidden deep in the soil, but you have some ideas.

*SFX:*
• Commune with Nature: 1/+2d
• Infravision: 1/+2d

• Great Strength 1/+2d
• Heightened Senses 1/+2d
• Psychic Link 1/+2d

### Martin Russ
Little is known; seen by many as a reclusive mountain man, closest neighbor to Landon, greatly enjoys the rustic, frontier life. Gregarious and loyal to the few he calls friends, no one is certain how he was selected to come to Janus. Escaped subject of government experiments. Intense psychic training.

*SFX:*
• Psychic Mind Wipe 1/+2d
• Psionic Blast 1/+2d
• Psychic Shield 1/+2d
• Implanted Programming 1/+2d
• Find the Weakness 1/+2d
• Blaster Rifle 1/+2d

# SPACE REJECTS

Underdog stories have been a part of our species since the dawn of recorded history (the tale of David and Goliath comes to mind) and probably even longer; it's not difficult to imagine yarns of hunter-gatherers singlehandedly felling wooly mammoths being spun in caves all over the world. *Space Rejects* follows this tradition. You have the perfect set-up for it here—a seemingly undefeatable race of alien robots threatening all of humankind and the only thing standing in their way being a gaggle of benchwarmers. You just don't get more "underdog" than that.

The Series features the last of the "real" herœs (i.e., Commander Ulysses Steadwell), who has many functions within the Series. His foremost utility is to act as a contrast to the motley assortment of ragtag PCs; whereas he is extremely efficient and competent, they are...

not those things. Sure, they have their specialties, but each one has something about them that keeps them from being truly perfect herœs. His presence is an ever-present reminder of their flaws, as he's never shy about bawling them out for those shortcomings. He also serves as a direct catalyst to launching the PCs into various adventures ("I've got a mission for you... but if you screw it up, like you always do, your butts are mine").

The diminutive robot, Zarky, is purely for comic relief, though he has a tendency to come in handy at the most unexpected times. Have fun with that.

### Plots

Regarding the Plot Dial, most of the stories are stand-alone, though occasionally something might happen that alters all Episodes to come. The following are some of the few instances of plotline-movers:

• *Meet Zarky:* This serves as Zarky's first appearance and it should happen very early in the Series. The PCs somehow find him after he was discarded in a garbage compactor. He offers to give them information about his former masters in return for saving him. You can use this intel throughout the Series, as a plot device.

• *Missing:* Commander Steadwell has come up missing and must learn to go it alone while they get to the bottom of his disappearance. This could be on ongoing plotline that lasts for many Episodes (with perhaps some unrelated Episodes thrown in for the sake of variety). Was he captured by the Mekaxis? Did his ship crash on a remote planet? Is he just testing the PCs to see if they've finally become the herœs that he said they could never be?

• *The Hero Returns:* One of the herœs thought to have been killed in the big battle shows up and tries to uncharacteristically usurp Steadwell's authority. This leads to a great deal of turmoil in the ranks of the TDF, with some supporting Steadwell and others supporting the re-

turning hero. Civil war looms ominously, as the situation becomes progressively heated. Is the hero legit or is it a scheme by the Mekaxis to cause dissention, thus weakening the humans.

# WarpCruise76

The hooks for the generation of Plot on *Warp-Cruise-76* are nearly always character-driven, tied to one of the principal crewmembers, also known as PCs, or to a character somehow connected to one of them. Occasionally, a plot point can also rest of the proverbial shoulders of an initially unremarkable, harmless-looking passenger. It's interesting to note that the natives of the Altairian Emerald Moon have four shoulders each, but that is neither here nor there... The show as such did not have much going on in the way of multi-episode Plot, simply because a voyage of the Omega-9 would be concluded, happily, when the episode in question was concluded (and vice versa). The vacationers would leave with a smile, some laughs would be shared at the space port, and there would be a new voyage with all new passengers next week, also telling its own one-episode stories. Basically, the passengers and supporting characters of any given Episode would bring along their own Plot details like luggage.

That is not to say that the look and feel of the series did not also slightly change (some say, degrade and turn even shallower!) over its four-season run. The machinations of Petunia Grady's Metrocruise Enterprises and General Morgan would slowly, but surely have a few repercussions on the main characters. These two antagonists would bring the small Rigellia Voyages cruise line to the brink of a shutdown more than once, only to have the herœs of the series pull off a last-minute heroic feat to turn things around and be celebrated for a bit, or at least preserve the status quo: everyone is employed in their regular job aboard the Omega-9, no lasting commitments on a planet somewhere, and the cruise line continuing, de-

fying a much larger competitor. The repetitive format of the Episodes is further emphasized by higher numbers in the Thematic and Recurring Dials. There is more than enough to draw from those in every Episode.

As a matter of fact, with all the romance and often shallow melodrama unfolding aboard the space cruise ship, the stories of *WarpCruise-76* would call for the use of the Drama Trait more than the other two. Adventure Intents will be needed at critical moments, to everyone's delight, and often in Act 3 and 4. However, the challenges and conflicts of WarpCruise were predominantly social in nature, and social situations require Drama Intents by all PCs. Even robots could act quite dramatic on the show. So, you basically have a situation where a Plot detail prompts a Scene that will have at least a handful of Drama Intents, and a Drama Intent should be enhanced by bringing in something from Plot once you have that chance.

Aunt Betty tells Captain Sholano that she has recently acquired a flower farm on a distant agricultural moon, but now a wealthy passenger on this week's voyage wants to build his own industrial buildings on the same moon. He is taking this flight with the Omega-9 to meet with prospectors and organize deals. The crew has to keep the wealthy industrialist happy, but they also have to keep Aunt Betty happy... It's her money and her farm, after all. By the end of the Episode, they should have succeeded in keeping the passenger's company off that moon, or found another compromise. All of this is Drama fodder!

Can the crewmembers show the industrialist the beauty of nature on a shuttle flight? Can they arrange for the industrialist, who is widowed and sullen, to meet a nice single lady at his dinner table? Can they have them go on a brilliant first date in outer space, which has them fall in love while one of them carries a bouquet of flowers... and what it is purple roses from that very farm?
If that sounds too constrained or too sappy for

you (well, we admit that it sort of is), then maybe something happens that makes the moon worthless for both parties. Or the industrialist loses his memory, or there are insane regulations and additional costs involved that he just dœsn't want to deal with. Maybe the moon is split in twain when a meteor hits... Splitting a moon on screen and having the two parts still go on functioning for human farming and other activities could be out of reach for the show's budget. So maybe the writers (i.e. the players!) decide to go with a soap opera plot after all, and the industrialist meets a long-lost daughter on this trip, who happens to be an environmentalist working for Aunt Betty, and loves the strange flowers as well.

## Plots

• *Sudden Awakening:* One of the crewmembers starts the Episode out lovesick or sad for another reason, or is ridiculed due to an earlier mishap, and is later revealed to have a new crucial talent or skill when they are desperately needed, succeeding in spite of themselves...

• The Imposter or Doppelganger: One of the PCs is replaced by a fully convincing shapeshifter or other sort of "evil twin"; the original character is still around on board somewhere, but without their uniform, tied up or hurt... while the imposter is taking over their life on board. The other PCs gradually start noticing that their friend isn't quite himself/herself. When the original PC shows up and confronts the imposter, this will be a climactic Scene, leading to the classic "Tell me something only the real [insert PC's name] could know..." moment.

• *The Mischievous Alien:* A weird alien visitor is secretly among the passengers, first in hiding, then more out in the open in front of many passengers. Mayhem and embarrassment are sure to follow, until the PCs have had a good talk with the new guest, explaining their situation. By the end of the Episode, the crew have managed to turn the alien into a clown act or simply sent them safely to their home planet.

• **Not Simply Vacationers:** Regular, inconspicuous (to the PCs, but not to the audience!) passengers have a dirty secret. They could be crooks looking for a chance to carry out that last big heist on board, robbing another important passenger or stealing something on a planet that is a port of call. Or they could be a deposed planetary dictator or aristocrat, trying to escape incognito with a lot of stolen funds and valuables, or they might be genuinely repentant, but scared for the life.

• **Robots on Strike:** The robots and the ship's A.I. system suddenly discover that they are sentient and valuable workers of the Omega-9, and thereby of Rigellia Voyages, and they start demanding paid leave, benefits, safer working conditions... This happens while the ship is already going dangerously off-course, and heading for a dangerous asteroid field, abandoned space mine, or similar location.

• **The Lure of Luxury:** One of the PCs is wooed by a rich and suave person, someone who seems incredibly smart, popular, and well-connected, promising them a much better, much more luxurious and easy-going life somewhere far away on another planet. The "Isn't This What You Always Desired?" kind of Episode has that PC consider leaving their job on the cruise ship forever, settling for a new life away from adventuring and stressful cruises. But the remaining PCs sense that this suitor is too good to be true, there has to be something else going on. It is their goal to keep their fellow crewmember from leaving (which would break apart the cast that the viewers of the show have grown to love), and also to expose the suitor as something horrible, or horribly dishonest.

• **We Are All Philanderers Here:** A cantankerous middle-aged married couple on the cruise suspect each other of having an affair going on, with somebody else on the ship. Maybe one of them is right, maybe both are right, in a way, or more likely, neither one is right, and it is all revealed as a silly misunderstanding in the end. This also ties very easily into the Recurring details of confusion due to twins / cross-dressers / shapeshifters / etc.

## Character Notes

Please note that the six PCs presented for *WarpCruise-76* here are odd choices for "action heroes", and with a modest SFX budget, with that Dial only at 2, they will have to spend most of an Episode without SFX. The suggested versions of these characters include a few important SFX costing 2 or even 3 SFX Points, so be aware that you won't see those often, unless drastic exceptions are allowed or developed over time. In our rules, if the SFX Dial is set to 2, but an effect costs 3 SFX Points, this means that a PC can only utilize this gimmick or move if something exceptional happens before, in the same Episode, or another PC willingly refrains from using some of their SFX Pool (see page 53, Gaining More SFX). In order to see the 3/+4d SFX, like Jake's Overwhelming Visions or Rascal's Interplanetary Little Black Book, there will have to be a good amount of very unselfish sharing of points.

The players of the other crewmembers have to prove they are good sports and good shipmates about it, and hand each other a few SFX Points, hoping that they will get to use their bigger SFX another time. If they are reluctant to share or give away all the SFX Points with no immediate return, everyone will have to stick to the 1/+2d options. Hopefully, there is still enough variety there.

# 1985

This Series is left intentionally vague. The goal highlighting the Series is to illustrate the varying types of 70s sci-fi. Aside from some wardrobe choices, there is nothing necessarily to indicate it is sci-fi or futuristic. In terms of Dials, an argument could be made for most any number for any of the Dials. It is every day in the life of a common man, the only exception being that anytime he goes somewhere he had never been before, he finds nothing but stark whiteness all around. If this was a British Series, likely it would have been a limited number of Episodes, and thus would have been heavy on plot. If it was an American Series, likely very little in the way of plot details would have been forthcoming, leaving much of the mystery up the imagination of the viewers. Every Episode starts with the same exact set-up, the protagonist awakes in his bed, which looks exactly the same: same crumpled shirt in the same location on the floor, etc. If, after losing Narrative Control being pursued by the constabulary, the Showrunner is more than welcome to reset events, and have the man awaken in his bed again.

Once a door is opened on one day, however, the next day and beyond, it is populated as it should be: so, opening a women's bathroom door on Day 1 would result in the white room effect. Day 2 and later, it would look like a women's room. Any time the player has Narrative Control, they can dictate what they know, possibly in a flashback.

What is really going on? That is up to you, the Showrunner to decide.

In terms of SFX, allow the player a 1/+2d effect, modifying it as they like, perhaps it is jury-rigged piece of equipment, or they do discover something futuristic and sinister.

A Showrunner might even allow a player to determine the other Dials for the Series.

Running this Series could very well be an interesting collaborative effort, as allowing Narrative Control would empower the player to help determine what was happening.

# Eyes of the SPHINX

You wanted rubber suits? You've got rubber suits!

Some Series are just plain fun for the sake of fun. This is one of those Series. This is not to say that a Showrunner couldn't gear it toward an audience not necessarily 13 and under, however.

# PSI Agents

Have fun with superpowered SFX, but consider the SFX at the time, and television budgetary restraints. A flying character might be possible, but how much would we see them really fly?

And understand that not every Intention a character makes uses SFX. Rather, SFX were the best part of the show. If they were overused, they would no longer be cool.

# Sheets and More

## The Character Sheet

RETROSTAR

Character Name:

Series Name:

Player:

*Series Dials:*  Thematic  Plot  Recurring  Cheese  SFX

Background:

ADVENTURE

THOUGHT

DRAMA

Casting:

Thematic

Plot

Recurring

Cheese

SFX

### How Many Dice Do I Roll and What Do I Keep?

| -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **3 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **2 dice** (add together the two results) | **3 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) | **4 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) |

This table is open-ended in both directions. Simply keep adding an extra die to the roll and keep the two lowest results or highest results, whichever is appropriate.

### Intention Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: *Fail and maintain control of their character* **OR** *Succeed and cede control of their character.* |
| 10+ | The character succeeds. |

SFX Pool:

Spectrum Games allows reproduction of this sheet for personal use.

## The Reference Sheet

### Reference Sheet

#### How Many Dice Do I Roll and What Do I Keep?

| -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **5 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **4 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **3 dice** (add together the 2 lowest results) | **2 dice** (add together the two results) | **3 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) | **4 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) | **5 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) | **6 dice** (add together the 2 highest results) |

This table is open-ended in both directions. Simply keep adding an extra die to the roll and keep the two lowest results or highest results, whichever is appropriate.

#### Assisting Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | Out and out failure. The assisting player has now added a -1d Obstacle to the other player. |
| 7-9 | No effect, and maintain control: the assisting player was not successful, but did not hinder, and they maintain control of their character. **OR** Success and cede control: The assisting player gives a 2d Benefit to the other player, but cedes control of their character. |
| 10+ | Success! The assisting character gives a 2d Benefit to the other player. |

#### Opposed Intentions

| | | Character A: | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2-6 | 7-9 | 10+ |
| Character B: | 2-6 | Both fail, the Showrunner decides what happens, either they are both out, or they may continue. | Character A partially succeeds, character B suffers a -1d penalty. | Character A succeeds. |
| | 7-9 | Character B partially succeeds, character A suffers a -1d penalty. | Draw! characters may continue, both suffering a -1d penalty. | Character A succeeds. |
| | 10+ | Character B succeeds. | Character B succeeds. | Draw! Characters may continue. |

#### Intention Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: *Fail and maintain control of their character* **OR** *Succeed and cede control of their character.* |
| 10+ | The character succeeds. |

#### Intention Results (For the Reboot)

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. Failure means failure, there is no way around it. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: *Fail and empower a different character* **OR** *Succeed and hinder a different character.* |

#### Spotlight Tokens

**Spotlight Token Pool**
At the beginning of a Series, the PCs begin each Episode with a communal pool of Spotlight Tokens equal to the total number of players multiplied by 3. As characters develop (i.e. define their Personal Dials), this number will decrease, until it is equal to the number of players multiplied by 2, plus 1.

**Spending Spotlight Tokens**
A player may spend a Spotlight Token from the pool and activate something from the acting character's aspects (Background, Casting or Descriptors) to gain +2 to an Intent.

## The Series Bible

### Series Bible
#### Casting For Series Leads (PCs)

CHARACTER NAME: _____
BACKGROUND

SFX

CHARACTER NAME: _____
BACKGROUND

SFX

CHARACTER NAME: _____
BACKGROUND

### Series Bible
#### Casting and Production Notes

**ALLY SHOWRUNNER CHARACTERS**
ALLY NAME:          NOTES:

**ENEMY SHOWRUNNER CHARACTERS**
ENEMY NAME:          NOTES:

AVAILABLE SFX:          TERMINOLOGY:

RECURRING SETS/STOCK FOOTAGE:          FASHIONS:

### Series Bible
#### Series Overview

SERIES NAME:
SEASON NUMBER: _____ SEASON LENGTH: _____ EPISODES
PITCH

SERIES CONCEPT

**SERIES DIALS**

THEMATIC          CHEESE

PLOT          SFX

RECURRING          MISC. DIAL NOTES:

# RETROSTAR

**Character Name:**

**Player:**

**Series Name:**

*Series Dials:*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Thematic | Plot | Recurring | Cheese | SFX |

**Background:**

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**Casting:**

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## ADVENTURE
▲ _____
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## THOUGHT
▲ _____
▲ _____

## DRAMA
▲ _____
▲ _____

**Thematic**
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**Plot**
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**Recurring**
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**Cheese**
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**SFX**
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**SFX Pool:**

### How Many Dice Do I Roll and What Do I Keep?

| -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *4 dice* (add together the 2 lowest results) | *3 dice* (add together the 2 lowest results) | *2 dice* (add together the two results) | *3 dice* (add together the 2 highest results) | *4 dice* (add together the 2 highest results) |

This table is open-ended in both directions. Simply keep adding an extra die to the roll and keep the two lowest results or highest results, whichever is appropriate.

### Intention Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: *Fail and maintain control of their character* **OR** *Succeed and cede control of their character.* |
| 10+ | The character succeeds. |

# Series Bible

SERIES NAME: _____
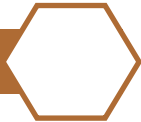
SEASON NUMBER: _____ SEASON LENGTH: _____ EPISODES

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SERIES CONCEPT
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## SERIES DIALS

### THEMATIC

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### CHEESE

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### SFX

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### RECURRING

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### MISC. DIAL NOTES:

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Series Bible

## Casting and Production Notes

### ALLY SHOWRUNNER CHARACTERS

ALLY NAME:                    NOTES:

### ENEMY SHOWRUNNER CHARACTERS

ENEMY NAME:                   NOTES:

AVAILABLE SFX:                TERMINOLOGY:

RECURRING SETS/STOCK FOOTAGE:      FASHIONS:

## Casting For Series Leads (PCs)

CHARACTER NAME: _____
BACKGROUND
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CHARACTER NAME: _____
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CHARACTER NAME: _____
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SFX
_____
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# Reference Sheet

## How Many Dice Do I Roll and What Do I keep?

| -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 5 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 4 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 3 dice (add together the 2 lowest results) | 2 dice (add together the two results) | 3 dice (add together the 2 highest results) | 4 dice (add together the 2 highest results) | 5 dice (add together the 2 highest results) | 6 dice (add together the 2 highest results) |

This table is open-ended in both directions. Simply keep adding an extra die to the roll and keep the two lowest results or highest results, whichever is appropriate.

## Assisting Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | Out and out failure. The assisting player has now added a -1d Obstacle to the other player. |
| 7-9 | No effect, and maintain control: the assisting player was not successful, but did not hinder, and they maintain control of their character. *OR* Success and cede control: The assisting player gives a 2d Benefit to the other player, but cedes control of their character. |
| 10+ | Success! The assisting character gives a 2d Benefit to the other player. |

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| | | Character A: | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2-6 | 7-9 | 10+ |
| **Character B:** | 2-6 | Both fail, the Showrunner decides what happens, either they are both out, or they may continue. | Character A partially succeeds, character B suffers a -1d penalty. | Character A succeeds. |
| | 7-9 | Character B partially succeeds, character A suffers a -1d penalty. | Draw! characters may continue, both suffering a -1d penalty. | Character A succeeds. |
| | 10+ | Character B succeeds. | Character B succeeds. | Draw! Characters may continue. |

## Intention Results

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: *Fail and maintain control of their character OR Succeed and cede control of their character.* |
| 10+ | The character succeeds. |

## Intention Results (For the Reboot)

| Die Total: | What Happens: |
|---|---|
| 2-6 | The character fails. Failure means failure, there is no way around it. |
| 7-9 | The player has a choice: Fail and empower a different character *OR* Succeed and hinder a different character. |

## Spotlight Tokens

**Spotlight Token Pool**
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# Master Index

# BRENT SPRECHER
## ARTIST



Brent Sprecher is the artist and designer behind the time-tripping images of *RETROSTAR*. Previously, he designed characters and provided cover artwork for Spectrum's superhero role-playing game *CAPES, COWLS & VILLAINS FOUL*, as well as for its follow-up *CCVF: GALLERY OF EVIL*, and designed characters for *CARTOON ACTION HOUR: SEASON THREE*.

Sprecher wrote a string of biographer comics for Bluewater Comics, including books on Ted Kennedy and Angelina Jolie, and co-created and wrote the four-issue all-ages adventure comic book *Spaced Out*, which debuted in 2014. Sprecher is currently the character designer and cover artist for Metahuman Press' *Lightweight* novel series.

Sprecher is available to design characters or provide cover artwork as a freelance professional. He also takes personal commissions. You can contact him at:

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Check out more of his artwork at: http://brentjs.deviantart.com/