

RETROSTAR

THE RPG OF 1970S-ERA SCI-FI TELEVISION



Now Playing in Theaters:
Far-Away Galaxies

Credits

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INTRODUCTION

Retrostar was designed to emulate 1970s sci-fi television. But, we cannot ignore sci-fi on the big screen, mainly because of a particular war in the stars. Therefore, for first supplement, we will give Showrunners all the tools they need to run their own epic sci-fi action film.

Sci-fi Action? Yes, that is what we are calling it. Later supplements will detail the other significant types of sci-fi films from the 1970s, but for right now, we are going to identify and break down these action films:

Epic, action-packed space-operas and rip-offs, best identified, obviously by the aforementioned “war in the stars”. In many ways, this film increased the public’s appetite for sci-fi more than anything, but deviating from the bleaker films, often starring Charlton Heston. These action films did not serve primarily to offer social commentary or symbolism. Rather, they were much more concerned with the vast vistas and SFX. Example films include *Star Wars*, *Battle Beyond the Stars*, *Message From Space*, and *Starcrash*.

That most iconic of films, the one about the war in the stars, is the paragon of what a *Retrostar* action film could be.

THE 3-ACT STRUCTURE

We will discuss Time Management and pacing first, as much of the rest of the rules modifications rely on and reference Time Management.

Instead of the 5-Act Structure, a sci-fi action movie will use the 3-Act Structure. The 3-Act Structure relies on 8 Sequences: two in Act 1, four in Act 2, and the final two in Act 3.

ACT 1

Sequence 1: Establish the Status Quo & Inciting Incident

The central character(s) are established, as well as the status quo. What is life like at the start of the story?

Introduce the inciting incident: the circumstance and change that will provide the main tension in the story.

While repairing two pieces of machinery, a farmboy uncovers a call for help.

Sequence 2: The Problem & No Turning Back

Establish the problem that is central to the story; hint at some of the obstacles that will stand in the way of the protagonists.

The end of Act 1 should bring the protagonists into the story in such a way that they must work towards some sort of resolution of the problem. Likely, this will push them in an unexpected direction, because, prior to this, everything was status quo.

After following up on the cry for help, the farmboy returns home to find his family slaughtered. The farmboy decides to leave home, and study an ancient religion.

ACT 2

Sequence 3: Introduction of the First Obstacle and Elimination of Alternatives

The protagonists will now be faced with their first major obstacle. Since there is no turning back, they see the options available to them narrow, and the stakes increase.

Travel to the specified location will be difficult, evil government not normally active on this backwater planet are an obvious presence.

Sequence 4: The First Battle & Midpoint

An even greater threat is introduced; the action rises, and the first “battle” is fought which will bring us to the midpoint of the film. Often, this first “battle” will have parallels in the final “battle” of the film.

Travel is very difficult, the specified destination has been destroyed by weapon of unimaginable power. Protagonists captured.

Sequence 5: Subplot and Increased Tension

After this first “battle” something called “Second Act Sag” can set in, where the story meanders. The cure for this is the use of subplots to continue to raise the tension.

A beautiful princess needs rescuing.

Sequence 6: The Main Culmination

As Act 2 comes to a close, there will be an epic “battle” which may very well bring some tragedy (which will then provide even more impetus for the protagonists). This should be a low-point for one or more protagonists.

Escape from the villains, epic fight between an unlikely combatant and the overlord of the evil empire. Tragic death.

ACT 3

The Third Act will often be fast-paced, most of the important set-up should occur in Acts 1 & 2.

Sequence 7: Against Overwhelming Odds & New Twist

Perhaps licking their wounds, the tension continues to increase, and a new twist is likely introduced.

Several protagonists quit, collecting their money for services rendered, a longshot flaw in the evil empire’s superweapon discovered.

Sequence 8: Resolution

A final battle. It all comes down to this.

The farmboy is one of the few remaining pilots, must attempt to destroy superweapon, the quitters return, and he discovers he has a great power within him.



TIME MANAGEMENT

Two-hour movie = 120 Intentions. Simple.

Three Acts = 40 Intentions per Act. Also simple.

Showrunners should try and stick to the above as closely as possible. What follows is defined more broadly, along with some advice.

ACT 1: 2 Sequences = 20 Intentions per Sequence.

The 1st Sequence of the movie establishes the universe and the characters and the status quo. Intentions fixing robots and dodging hillbilly aliens are encouraged. Take your time with this portion of the film. Explore the mundane and give us peeks at what the universe looks like in some of the corners not immediately apparent to the naked eye.

The captured princess’s secret distress call, pleading an old friend for help, occurs at the 20-minute mark. Imagine that. As if 20 Intentions were used.

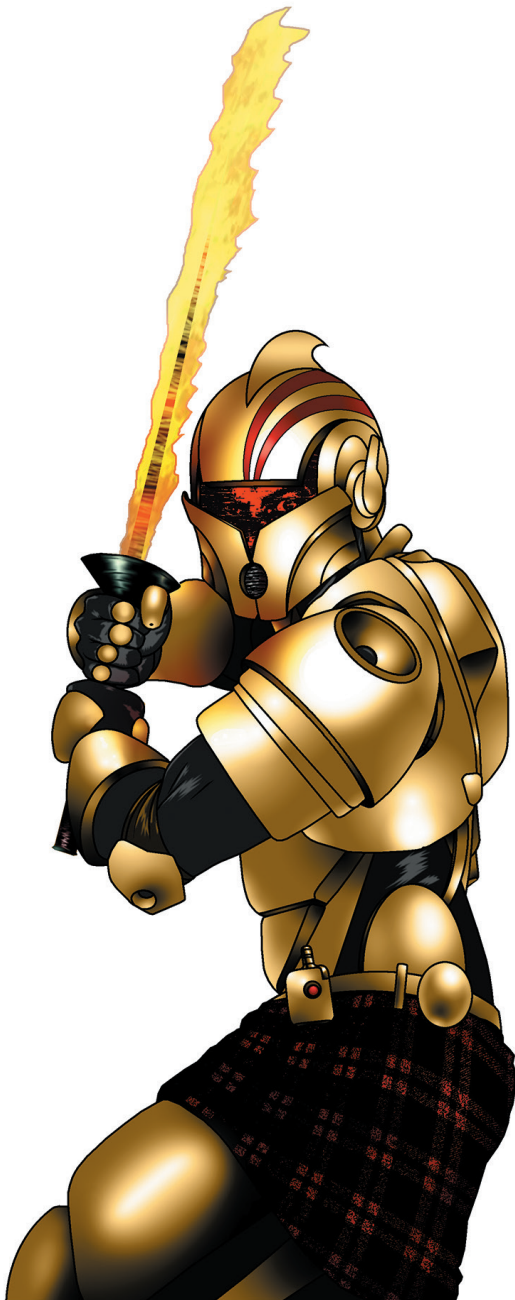
At the 40-minute mark, the innocent farmboy now wants to learn the way of an ancient, quasi-magical discipline and agrees to travel with the mentor to a far-away planet after finding his remaining relatives have been slaughtered.

ACT 2: 4 Sequences... 2 leading up to the midpoint, and 2 after. Roughly 10 Intentions per sequence.

Because you are building to Act 3, a Showrunner should use Time Management as an ally, ending the Act at just the right moment and transitioning to the 3rd Act. Imagine if the trio of the farmboy, the roguish gunslinger-pilot and his best pal stormed off their enhanced freighter and decided to fight the main commander in the imposing dark armor (a 4d or 5d opponent). That would be anti-climactic. Instead, we are left with a scene where the farmboy’s old mentor steps in to make a valiant sacrifice. Perhaps the Showrunner asked the

players of the rogue and his big shaggy co-pilot to make Thought Intentions vs. the powerful armored commander. Why? Because they would both realize he would easily kill them, and money was what was most important to them. Right?

ACT 3: The two Sequences in the final Act are important to understand, but may very well be ignored for the sake of Intentions. The plot is obviously building and culminating, and at this point, Successes and Failures will have significant consequences. 40 Intentions for the final Act.



THE CHARACTERS

With the 3-Act Structure explained and defined, let us examine the characters. You will notice the character sheet looks a bit different. This is because the movies were different than series and thus require special treatment.

Background

The Showrunner defines the initial Background of the PCs. Part of what makes these films successful is that we do not know everything about the characters going into the theater, and they change and develop over the course of the movie. Instead of detailing every piece of minutiae in a Background, instead think of the Background as what we first know about the character from their initial introduction. We do not know that the farmboy is connected to the mystical living energy. Heck, we don't even know what this uncanny energy *is*. Show, don't tell. Revealing the Backgrounds through play will make the experience that much more significant. How? Read on.

Casting

Actors often like to chew scenery. Players should be encouraged to do the same. A character's Casting should not give everything away, and over the course of a movie, a character will develop not just their Background, but as we appreciate the actor playing the role, their casting can develop also. Do not limit yourself with too much description of the PC's personality, because players may very well find something out about the character that they were not expecting. If a farmboy's casting was defined as whiney and melodramatic, this would be a primary focus of the character from their first appearance on screen. But, is it fair to say that, through moments of great distress, we do learn that said farmboy is indeed kind of whiney (at least in the first film)?

Optional Rule: Intentions as "Saving Throws"

Because of the design of the Intention System, which is all about control of a character, we want to expand the significance of what an Intention can be. Some RPGs use "Saving Throws" as a way to avoid a situation. Intentions can be used the same way, especially Thought and Drama Intentions. In the example used, with the rogue and the co-pilot character failing an Intention roll, the Showrunner very clearly wants to establish that these two are mercenary outlaws. The Showrunner is playing into their reputations, and building tension, and increasing the drama. It is totally appropriate for a Showrunner to ask for an Intention as a sort of Saving Throw. If the characters fail, they have to act according to their character. What about those 7-9 results? Let us examine this example scenario:

The Showrunner has asked the players of the rogue pilot guy and the hairy co-pilot to make Thought Intentions against the commander. The latter is at least a 4d Obstacle. What if they roll 7-9? Success should mean that they are able to fight off their outlaw and self-serving natures. Failure should mean they acquiesce. Right?

Where it gets complicated is the ceding of control and maintaining control. Succeed and cede control, or fail and maintain control. Both of these should have consequences. If

the characters had succeeded and ceded control, make the situation much worse. The rogue and the co-pilot stay to fight the commander, while at the same time, perhaps they activate their spaceship's autopilot to get the farmboy and the princess and the pesky robots far away. The characters succeeded, right? They have ignored their basest urges to run away.

Fail and maintain control. They failed their Saving Throw, they want to get as far away as possible. They want nothing to do with the aforementioned commander. Sure, they have maintained control of their characters, but at what cost? If they protest, remind them that this was not a one-time Saving Throw.

When the time is right, you can allow them to re-enter the picture, as they do have control of their character. Just because a player has control does not mean that they determine if they are in a particular Scene.

The rogue and his first mate collect their payment, and take off, wanting nothing to do with the sinister commander.

And at just the right moment, the Showrunner asks the players what they want to do. And, because of the Intention System, we are not concerned with getting there. They want to help and they do so! And in soars the unexpected freighter!

Use this Saving Throw Intention any time it is appropriate. Any time a character is potentially acting against their nature, a Saving Throw might be the way to go. This rule can be used in non-movie games of *Retrostarc* as well!

Intention Results	
Die Total:	What Happens:
2-6	The character fails.
7-9	The player has a choice: <i>Fail and maintain control of their character</i> OR <i>Succeed and cede control of their character.</i>
10+	The character succeeds.

Expanding Upon Background and Casting

In Acts 1 and 2, whenever a Character expends a Spotlight Token, they can add new information to their Background or Casting. In this way, a Showrunner can peel back the curtain and reveal more about the characters. The Showrunner and player may work together for the wording and placement, but don't spend too much time on it. It may also be that the Showrunner may have some of this information pre-prepared: "owes money to a galactic crime-lord", "mystically attuned offspring of a great knight-enforcer". These supplements to Background and Casting do not have to immediately be related to the Spotlight Token being used, and may occur after a specific piece of information is revealed. Once this supplemental information is "unlocked", it can be used by the player for later Spotlight Tokens.

Any Spotlight Tokens expended in Act 3 can be noted by the player if they like (on the back of a character sheet, index card, etc.), in case there is a sequel.

Traits

PCs will have higher Adventure, Thought, and Drama Traits than stars of a TV show, assigning: +1, 0, -1 to the three Traits and add 2 additional points ("levels"), thus creating the possible Trait values:

Option A: 3, 0, -1

Option B: 1, 2, -1

Option C: 1, 0, 1

Option D: 2, 0, 0

Characters with a 3 in a Trait will, of course, have 3 Descriptors for that Trait.

SFX

A Showrunner will define the starting SFX available to every character. Some characters may develop or acquire new SFX throughout the span of a movie. These new SFX should be given to the player coinciding with the appropriate supplemental Background.

However, sometimes these amazing new abilities do not reveal themselves until the 3rd Act. In this case, upon the expenditure of the appropriate Spotlight Token (and at the Showrunner's discretion), these new SFX will be given to the player.

The farmboy gains the Background detail:

Mystically attuned offspring of a great inter-planetary enforcer

In the final Act, the player spends a Spotlight Token to highlight this, and this unlocks a new ability. However, what if the Showrunner didn't want to unlock the SFX ability at that moment, or what if there were multiple SFX? The Showrunner can delay (for the former) or reveal them one at a time (for the latter). Thus, a character unlocks a 1/+2d SFX ability, they use this ability, and then unlock a 2/+3d ability.

Can a player use these SFX right away or even on that same Intention? In the 3rd Act, the farmboy activates their "Mystically attuned" Background, and the Showrunner gives the player an SFX. If it is appropriate, they may very well be able to use it on that Intention. This is stuff memorable movie moments are made of.

Sample SFX

Blaster, Laser Pistol: 1/ +2d
Light Sword Combat: 1/ +2d
Cosmic Senses/ Attunement: 1/ +2d
Weapon at Max Power: 2/ +3d
Telekinesis: 2/ +3d
Light Sword: 2/ +3d
Evil Cosmic Powers: 2/ +3d
Cosmic Mind Powers: 3/ +4d







OTHER RULES

The following rules apply to games meant to emulate motion pictures, though Showrunners may pick and choose as they see fit. If they don't feel certain rules fit their movie concept or vibe, then they should feel free to remove them or even modify them so that they *do* fit.

"Act 3" Showrunner Characters

Often in the 3rd Act, one or more PCs will have to face off against one significant adversary. This adversary might have a 4d or higher Obstacle value attributed to them. Give them some SFX and they may very well be unbeatable. To truly capture those memorable fight scenes—one PC going mano-a-mano with the Big Bad—assign the SC Traits just like a PC, and have the characters Oppose one another (*Retrostar* rulebook, p. 57). This will capture the back-and-forth that occurs, especially if both characters are utilizing SFX, and being that the SCs do not have Spotlight Tokens...

Failure is Fun!

Being trapped in the trash compactor is a perfect example of Failure is Fun! One or more of the characters Failed, or perhaps even succeeded and ceded control, and now the PCs are in an entirely different bad situation. Introducing a swimming gastropod creature inside the trash is a use of SFX by the Showrunner, just to bring flavor and fun to the situation. The compactor is also SFX being spent. And the characters use Thought and Action, and finally other characters re-enter the picture at just the right moment.

Failure by a character or characters is a great way to split the party, and continue to show off interesting corners of the universe, as well as taking the story in unexpected directions.

Spotlight Tokens and SFX Budget

Players will have the normal allotment of Spotlight Tokens and SFX available to them in Acts 1 and 2. Total. Not per Act.

But, 2 Acts is 80 Intentions, an Episode is 60 Intentions, that's not fair! Right? Wrong. For the 3rd and Final Act, all Spotlight Tokens and SFX refresh to their starting amounts.

But, how much SFX should a movie have? The Dials go to 6, right? Well, often, the movies had bigger budgets, so let whatever hokey religion you pay heed to guide you. If you want to give each player a pool of 10 SFX, with individual SFX in the range of $5/+6d$, who are we to stop you? This is your movie.

A Showrunner might even decide to have one amount of SFX for Acts 1 and 2, and an even greater amount in Act 3.

The point is, for Act 3, the players start with a clean slate. Why? Because the 3rd Act is when all the cool stuff happens.

Additionally, we strongly encourage using the optional Deadly Spotlight Tokens rules (*Retrostar* rulebook, p. 61) for Act 3, if death is on the table. And you can even stack the deck by including one or more jokers in the cards dealt out to the players.

Injuries

Injuries can linger from Scene to Scene, and even Act to Act. If a character fails, a Showrunner may decide to give them an injury. An injury will inflict 1d Obstacle to one specific Trait.

When does the injury heal? When it is dramatically appropriate. Or, at the Showrunner's discretion, the use of a Spotlight Token when using the affected Trait may remove the injury. We suggest not allowing this until the final 60 minutes (Intentions) of a film.

Can a character have more than one injury? We suggest against it.

Teasers

Commercials, and conversations on the school bus and trips down the toy aisle excited us about all the cool stuff we had not yet seen.

A Showrunner can start out a movie, or at lulls between scenes, and give teasers of things to come, be it a description of a desert planet, or even quotes “hokey religions and ancient weapons,” “as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced,” or even write down the effect of an SFX “4/ +5d” without revealing what it is, or who it will be assigned to. A Showrunner may narrate these teasers, or write them down, or draw a picture, or find a photo reference...whatever works.

On-The-Fly SFX

Sometimes characters improvise and discover something cool on their person, or an interesting new way to use a piece of equipment. Let’s say grappling hooks were standard on Stormsoldier armor. A Showrunner could write up the armor with all the specs, but this would require planning, knowing what the specs were and realizing the PCs might want to steal some Stormsoldier armor...

Or...

...the Showrunner can allow for use and creation of on-the-fly SFX: the characters have donned Stormsoldier armor; I think we all know in our hearts it didn’t provide much protection, but when the farmboy needed a grappling hook, well, look at that, a grappling hook!

In cases like this, the Showrunner should allow a character to make an Intent (likely Thought):

"On-The-Fly SFX" Intention Results	
Die Total:	What Happens:
2-6	No such effect exists, or the PC has broken it by trying to use it.
7-9	Yes, there is an effect, but it will require a 2nd Intent to use properly OR Yes, there is an effect, it will only utilize SFX on a 1/ +1d ratio OR Yes, there is an effect, but when using it, any roll of 7-9 will result in failure upon usage.
10+	Yes, there is an effect. Showrunner will give it an appropriate standard SFX value with the ratio.

SHOWRUNNER: Fleeing the enemy soldiers, you come to a large chasm aboard the space station with no way across.

PLAYER: But, I am wearing their uniform. Is there anything on the uniform I might be able to use?

SHOWRUNNER: Make a Thought Intent.

[PLAYER rolls the dice and...]

This shouldn’t happen often.

“Well, it’s done. It’s happened. The stars are clear. The planets shine. We’ve won. Oh, some dark force, no doubt, will show its face once more. The wheel will always turn; but for now it’s calm. And for a little time, at least, we can rest.”

— The Emperor (*Starcrash*)

Character Name:

Movie Title:

Player:

Background:

Casting:

Supplemental Background/Casting:

ADVENTURE

▲

▲

▲

THOUGHT

▲

▲

▲

DRAMA

▲

▲

▲

SFX:

SFX Pools

Acts 1 and 2:

Act 3:

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: <i>Fail and maintain control of their character</i> OR <i>Succeed and cede control of their character.</i>
10+	The character succeeds.