Roaring Rockets Game Master Guide

Roaring Rockets can be different from other role-playing games. It is a hundred-year-old genre, and everything in it predates the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. The biggest challenge is the adventures are for a culture unfamiliar to the players and game master.

The genre & culture is different: Read the genre & culture guide (`RR_Genre`), and info for making Roaring Rockets adventures (`RR_Adventures_for_RR`).

New game masters: Read the game master starter (`RR_GM_101`) and adventure design starter (`RR_Adventure_design_101`) if you are not an experienced game master.

Men & Women

There are differences between male and female characters in this game. The group often needs both to succeed. This works much better if players use a character of their own gender (suggestion: require it).

Leadership and misbehavior

Whenever a player gets an experience penalty, the leader gets a matching experience penalty. Some players consistently goof up and get penalties. Encourage the leaders player to work with the problem player instead of rejecting them.

These people often goof up their real lives as well as their characters. Encourage the leaders player to practice real leadership. If the leaders player can help the person to not goof up the game, the person is probably being genuinely helped.

If the leaders player is unwilling to meet the challenge, pick someone who probably will and promote their character into the leadership position.

All leadership is ultimately moral leadership. The game masters and the leaders player should set the example by doing the right thing no matter what it appears to cost in the short term. They should endeavor to do it in real life as well.

Space Rangers

Many role-playing games have characters out for themselves. You can do this in Roaring Rockets, but it works better if the characters are Space Rangers (or Space Cadets assigned to the Space Rangers). The Space Rangers are like the marshals of the old American West. They roam around in small groups making the frontier safer.

Exploration-oriented games could have everyone be Star Scouts. Star Patrol games are perfectly viable as well.

It is a good idea to start new characters as Space Cadets.

See the service organization guide for more details (`RR_Service_orgs`).

All players should see the Use-Of-Force guidelines (`RR_Use_Of_Force`).

Use of deadly force

We see lots of fictional characters killed on-screen every day. Modern action heroes use a lot of deadly force. And the audience is entertained.

Pulp science fiction did a lot less killing, because that was not what the audience came for (unless it was about war). People got tied to chairs a lot in radio plays, and in books they got knocked out.

Ever talk to a world war veteran? Ask him about the guy he took prisoner. Why did you shoot him in the leg? To avoid killing him.

Like our policemen, characters in the Space Rangers or other service organizations can get into trouble for using unnecessary force *(often a demerit)*. Unaffiliated characters can get arrested for battery or manslaughter. You may need to remind some players that their character has a cultural aversion to unnecessary killing.

This is not usually a problem because stun guns and tactical batons are highly effective weapons. Justifications for deadly force include war, monsters, and being attacked with deadly force.

Be sure all players have seen the use-of-force guidelines (`RR_Use_of_force`).

Space combat

Three pages of the rules are devoted to space combat. You will need to do some, but keep it to a minimum. Space combat uses powerful weapons that can kill a character outright (never fun), and a series of unfavorable die rolls can wipe out all the characters.

If the fight has are more than a couple space ships, the tactical space combat system can make it easier to visualize what is going on (`RR_Tactical_space_combat`). A simple fight is usually better with the abstract vehicle combat system in the rules.

Range modifiers for firearms

The rules make no provision for distant things being harder to hit, because combat in role-playing games is almost always at short range. If you need to have long range combat, use these range modifiers (penalties to the shooter).

Pistols:	0-10m: -0	10-20m: -1	20-30m: -2	30-40m: -3	40-50m: -4
Carbines:	0-15m: -0	15-30m: -1	30-45m: -2	45-60m: -3	60-75m: -4
Rifles:	0-20m: -0	20-40m: -1	40-60m: -2	60-80m: -3	80-100m: -4

Using a rest when aiming (resting a rifle or pistol on something) effectively halves the range to the target. Using a rifle scope does also.

If you cannot find this table quickly when you need it, just wing it.

Adventure design and the Bible

Most people who read pulp science fiction went to Sunday school growing up. Most of them went to church every week. They and their pulp science fiction characters knew the Bible well.

Most adventures should have the characters bringing rescue, reason, law, justice, and/or morality in some way; that is what so many pulp stories were about. Use Bible scripture verses in the setup to underline the characters role; it is an excellent genre-compatible way to let the players know what is expected of their characters. The Internet is a good resource for Bible scripture.

Example: if the characters are to bring peace, search for peace scriptures; you will get a large menu of Bible quotes. Use the most appropriate ones for the adventure in your setup.

Powers are evil

Characters & other good guys never use mental powers or paranormal power. The Bible is clear that there are only two sources of paranormal power: God and His fallen servant. Anything not of God is a trick.

The audiences of old did not put up with good guys using paranormal power. When publishers tried this stuff in pulp science fiction, the blowback was severe.

Nobody tried this more than once. Even as late as the 1960s, *Star Trek* was nearly taken off the air when Captain Kirk let an alien intelligence possess his body.

Causality

In fiction, causality is the principle that actions have consequences. Every evil word and act will come back to haunt the character. Pulp science fiction and comics used this principle frequently. It works well in Roaring Rockets adventures.

Polite speech

There was no cursing whatsoever in the pulp science fiction genre, not even with surrogate swear words. The closest they got was when Buck Rogers exclaimed *ROARING ROCKETS! LOOK AT THAT!*

Characters do not swear at all, not even with surrogate swear words. Players should speak politely as well.

Some role-playing games have a statistic called LUCK. This game does not. When you look for the victim something bad happens to, pick the player with the dirtiest or least respectful mouth. When looking to bestow something good on someone, pick the player with the politest speech. It is OK to ask the players feedback on who should get it.

Try to be more polite than the players to set the example.

Retro-Tech

Try playing Roaring Rockets in a semiconductor-free environment. Print what you need ahead of time, but turn off the phones, calculators, and computers when you play. This will not work well for everyone, but can provide a more immersive experience. The genre had space ships, paper, and pencils.

The Earth government

Most governments were smaller a hundred years ago, and people liked it that way. They had a saying: The government that governs least governs best. Pulp science fiction governments reflected this.

The Earth government is small and hands-off. It handles the common defense, ensures that local government services happen, smacks down corruption, provides some police services on the frontier, keeps the powerful in check, and keeps the wheels of commerce turning. That is about it.

The genre is incompatible with an Earth government that is controlling, omniscient, oppressive, evil, corrupt, insidious, or conspiratory. An adventure about stopping an evil trying to get a foothold in the Earth government would be fine, though.

The role of women

Most of the pulp sci-fi stories did not have women in charge of men. The same goes for non-traditional gender roles. Game masters may ignore this precedent and play a mod game instead. In an ultra-mod game women are also allowed to fight in the military.

If you want to go traditional:
- A woman may be in charge, but she will not often be placed in charge of men by superiors. Of course, sometimes the best man for the job is a woman, as they would say before putting a woman in charge.
- A female character may not be in the military or have military background, such as space marine.
- Women get a badge of virtue decoration instead of promotion every other time. This gets them the respect they deserve without much danger of them outranking the men.

Talk to your female players when deciding policy. You may want to apply mod or traditional policy on an ad-hoc basis (a hybrid game). A hybrid game can also be alternating game masters with different policy.

Setting up character sheets

Keeping clean character sheets makes them easy to use.

The best use for the backside appears to be writing character background (RR_CharSheet_backside).

Keeping separate sheets for experience, equipment, money, and decorations works well (RR_Sheet_addendum).

Make sure that character sheet artwork conforms to the standards of the day. No suggestive artwork or sexy poses, nothing that would be covered by a bikini or underwear, everything is PG rated.

Pulp cover art sometimes had racy drawings of women, sometimes with torn clothing. But they did not do sexy poses, arched backs, bedroom eyes, or reveal too much.

Do not permit a character sheet, standup, or miniature that goes too far to be used in a Roaring Rockets game.

Equipment burden

Nobody wants to carry a bunch of heavy stuff around. The players may want their characters to carry 3 rifles and a 60-pound load, but the characters would not want to do that. Have the players role-play when deciding what to bring.

A reasonable load is a 20-pound or less pack. Characters expecting trouble might bring a rifle. Rifles are big, heavy, and cumbersome.

A character might bring a pistol, baton, or sword. Perhaps two of these. Or maybe a rifle and one of them if expecting trouble.

Small things like a collapsing baton or a little extra ammo are a minimal burden. Armor is uncomfortable. The characters would not put it on unless expecting trouble. They might wear a vest or helmet for possible trouble.

Stellar re-use

It is good design to re-use a star system in a later adventure. But in practice multiple game masters make multiple adventures and somebody will eventually put a different star system around a previously used star. The best way to handle this is to not worry about it. The players rarely revisit the same star after an extended absence. A game master can put either system around the star to suit the needs of the campaign.

Technology and Sociology

This game provides a consistent game-supporting technology and society like many pulp science fiction works used. Most writers a hundred years ago just made it up as they went, and borrowed ideas from each other. Most of them did not worry about technology that would cause their imaginary society to unravel in 20 years. This game system does, so its technology is carefully defined.

What pulp science fiction technology is like

- Think typewriters and adding machines.
- Audio & music recordings are on magnetic tape and vinyl records.
- Computers are mostly single-purpose mechanical computing devices. Mathematicians who perform computations are also called computers. There are no electronic computers as we understand them.
- Technology is mostly devices operated by people.
- Technology is simpler and has a few knobs and buttons. Operator skill is required.
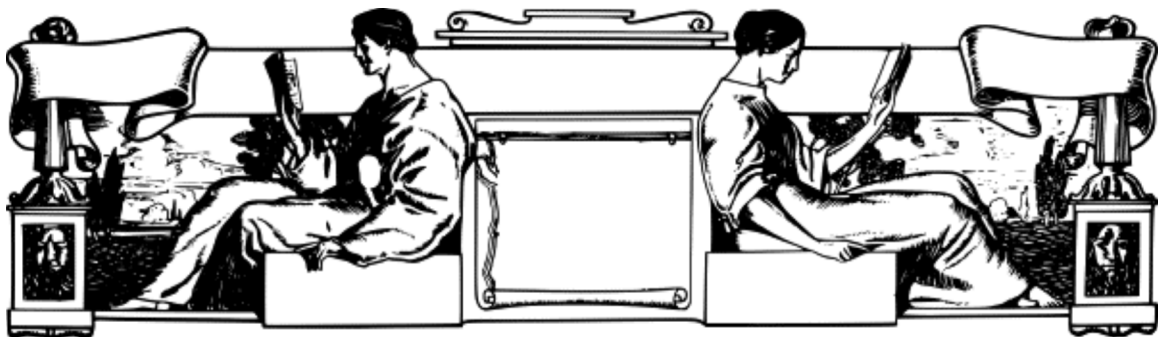
More pulp science fiction technology

- Videophones
- FAX machines and interstellar Faxes (the latter are only planet-to-planet)
- Teletypes & interstellar teletypes (the latter are only planet-to-planet)
- Cassette-tape based answering machines
- Cameras like Polaroids and 35mm film cameras
- Microwave ovens, photocopiers, and mechanical cash registers
- If a business is not in the telephone book the customers will not know it exists.
- Pagers are the size of a wallet and they beep when you should telephone your pager service. A mechanical voice will say who called your pager service. This only works in big cities on Earth or planets near it.

By VIC PHILLIPS
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Technology this game does NOT have

- **Nuclear weapons, nuclear power, or anything else atomic.** They do not really need them. Nuclear energy was not developed until the twilight of the pulp era. They knew about radiation, though.
- **Semiconductors.** Their electronics use relays and vacuum tubes. Our computers and electronics are beyond anything the writers imagined.
- **LEDs, LCDs, flat screens, or touch screens.** They have cathode ray tubes, nixie tubes, and Vacuum florescent Displays (VFDs) instead.
- **Computer software.** They have people who do things instead.
- **The Internet.** They go to libraries instead.
- **Artificial intelligence and robots that think for themselves** sometimes appeared in the genre, but are not consistent with the technology. Also, societies would be really different, quickly becoming robot-centric. This game does not have anything like them. Instead, it has people who do things.
- **Self-driving cars.** They drive their own cars.
- **Digital cameras, digital watches, or pocket calculators.** They have film cameras, mechanical watches, and slide rules.
- **Videos.** Their movie cameras use film.
- **GPS navigation.** They have radio-homing navigation instead.
- **Speech recognition.** They have someone listen instead.
- **Automated tellers or debit cards.** They have bank tellers and clerks instead.
- **Disintegrator rays** appeared in the genre but make for poor gameplay. Players hate it when you disintegrate parts of their characters with no possibility of healing.
- **Magnetic rays** appeared in the genre, but they are the stuff of mad science and hyper-advanced aliens. After the 1960s these started being called tractor beams. This is not anything the characters can have or build.
- **Lightsabers.** The genre is full of real swords, but no lightsabers.
- **Powersuits.** The technology doesnÕt support them.

Mad Science

Mad scientists are an important part of the genre, but be sure that any technology they develop is not reproducible or does not otherwise change the game environment.

For example, if you make an adventure where a mad scientist makes a disintegrator ray that nobody else can understand, that is fine. But if his workshop has a disintegrator ray assembly line that can be captured and duplicated, there would be disintegrator rays everywhere in a few years. This would pull your game away from the genre and probably make it less fun.

Be careful what your mad scientists make. Do not be afraid to announce that you are retroing out a mistake or something a guest game master introduced.

Technologies that appeared in the pulps, but are strictly in the realm of mad science:

- Robots & artificial intelligence
- Time travel
- Travel over absurd distances
- Magnetic rays (aka force rays or tractor beams)
- Body switching, brain transplants, etc

Robots

The robots in this genre were exclusively the realm of mad scientists. The technology of the genre cannot make robots, so only mad scientists can make them, and they can only make a limited number.

- Most robots are humanoid in form.
- Robots are always partly remote control. Some are 100% remote control, with an operator controlling their every move.
- Many robots are partly autonomous. Many can walk in a direction without tripping and falling.
- Highly advanced robots have a simple controller with a dozen buttons labeled 'acquire', 'return', 'fight', 'rescue', and so forth.
- There are no completely autonomous or thinking robots.

Suggested genre-compatible campaign types

- The characters are Space Rangers and operate much like the sheriffs or marshals of the old American west.
- The characters are Star Scouts and are explorers.
- The characters are in the Star Patrol and operate much like the coast guard.
- The characters are adventurers with no government affiliations or legal powers. They go to other planets where they explore, rescue, and foil bad guys. The sub-genre has stories of wandering heroes, heroes on call, tramp freighters, spaceships for hire, rich adventurers, newspaper reporters, private investigators, bounty hunters, and so forth.

Campaign types incompatible with this genre

- A group of dark anti-heroes does not fit in the genre.
- A group of adventurers out for themselves and engaging in morally questionable activities does not fit in the genre.
- Campaigns of a non-PG rated nature (Pulp scifi was PG rated, even though it predated the rating system)

Handling persistent character misbehavior

Some characters have morals or motivations that cause them to act in ways our forefathers would have called wrong. This behavior might even be acceptable in our society. Sometimes the character is OK, but the player plays him that way.

Give the player an appropriate number of warnings. If this fails to produce character behavior our forefathers would accept, condemn the character as evil. The evil character becomes property of the game master.

This character can then be used as a villain in future games, preferably in partnership with the player.

Forced retirement — the ultimate reward

A character used for a long time will eventually get a lot of rank, skills, money, decorations, and possessions. The game master can force the characters retirement when these get out of hand. This should be accompanied by some sort of promotion. Both the player and game master get a copy of the character for use as a non-player character, ideally as some sort of patron or supervisor. Whenever possible the player should be the one to role-play the character. **This is a reward, not a penalty.**

Any character that reaches rank Supervisor/Colonel/rank 5 is automatically retired in this way.

Award the player up to 6 extra skill points, 6 extra credits, and possibly a little rank when making their replacement character.

Disposition of assets

Characters sometimes leave, retire, or die. Unless the game master says otherwise, the other characters do **not** get his stuff.

Giving the characters a space ship

- If the characters do not have a space ship, the game master should assign one for the adventure as needed.
- Many campaigns will be more enjoyable if the characters have a fast ship. Some adventures require it.
- Size the ship to match the minimum and maximum number of players that often show up to the game. They must be able to crew it if few players show up, and they must be able to fit inside if many show up.
- A cutter is a good choice. It carries a crew of about the right size, it has a little cargo space, and many types are armed. Yet it is not a warship.
- Warships are not normally a good choice, unless they have been converted to something more useful. All warships are good for is blowing things up and getting shot at. When converting, first think of converting a real warship or warplane you are familiar with into a useful and cost-effective civilian vehicle, then you will understand the issues.
- Freighters are not normally a good choice, unless they have been converted to something more useful. They are huge, often slow, and most are not good in a fight. Imagine converting an 18-wheel tractor/trailer into a police vehicle and you will understand the issues.
- Do not over-arm the ship. You may want a nose gun for the pilot to shoot by aiming the ship. You may want a turret to give the crew something to do.
- Other crew can operate the scope, and possible a deflector or ECM if the ship has one. Running around fixing things is an important job called damage control.

Space combat

- Make sure the leader assigns A & B crews and battle stations every trip through space, even if you know they will not have to fight a space battle. The two crews alternate shifts & down-time.
- The co-pilot operates the scope on ships of the type characters often use. It is usually positioned so that he cannot copilot while using it, but a third crewman can use it while he helps the pilot.
- Most space ships have automatic bulkheads that shut when the ship springs a leak. The mechanism is simple and reliable. The ship will start to leak badly once some part of it is destroyed.
- No mechanism is 100% reliable, so space ship crews are trained to shut all doors and keep them shut if a battle might be fought. It takes longer to get from one part of the ship to another when doors have to be opened and shut just to move about.
- Standard procedure is for everyone to put on their space suits quickly when they might have to fight a space battle. It takes a few minutes, so crews taken by surprise must rely on automatic bulkheads.
- All potential battle stations have an oxygen line and emergency oxygen mask. It will stop working if the ship takes too much damage.

Space warfare

Opposing sides send fleets of space ships out to capture frontier planets and protect their own frontier planets.

Capturing planets is done by bringing siege-craft like ketches, monitors, or battleships into orbit to destroy ground defenses. Then the troops land in troopships. The defenders may outnumber the attackers, but orbiting bombards and the ability to move troops give the attackers a huge advantage. Siege takes a long time, so sometimes the defenders may negotiate the surrender of the planet and withdraw instead of fighting.

Once the defenders are low on ships, the attacking fleet may try planet-hopping to drive deep. The risk is that the defenders may be able to cut off the chain of planets and isolate the attacking fleet.

The most cost-effective size for a ship of war is 6-9, but big ships canÕt be two places at once. So fleets are composed mostly of little ships. The humble frigate is the dominant ship type in many fleets.

The backbone of many fleets is the frigate-escort-manowar-panzership-battleship series of warship types. The backbone of most earth fleets is destroyers & cruisers (earth prefers to win by maneuver).