

Scene Stealers

The New Generation!

1.1 A Quick Overview

The HMSS Xerxes suffers a mishap in hyperspace, shooting it to the far reaches of the galaxy. The crew meets a princess fleeing a tyrannical overlord; she promises to help the crew of the Xerxes to find their way home if they help free her people and restore her to power. (Pilot, 2hrs.)

In Scene Stealers, you're playing a member of an ensemble cast of a science fiction action show that's primarily watched by teenage boys. Teenage boys that belong to the science club. Each game takes place during one episode of the show. During the episode the cast members are not only trying to overcome obstacles, they're also trying to steal the spotlight from the other cast members.

Each episode is broken up into several "scenes". These scenes are basic major chunks of time: The crew breaking into an abandoned space station is a scene, running from a bunch of angry natives is a scene, fighting a bunch of bad guys with

zapguns is a scene.

1.2 These Games We Play

The crew is captured by the Gamesters of Omegacron-5 and are forced to fight in a gladiatorial arena. Between battles, they try to convince their fellow slaves to stage a revolt against the Gamesters.

Here's the section where every role-playing game describes what a role-playing game is. It's pretty straight forward. It's a GAME. Where you PLAY a ROLE. Look, just go to <http://landfill.thesnakefarm.com/aboutrpgs.php> and read a delightful comparison between *Our Town* and a cyberpunk game.

There's going to be a group of people sitting around a table or at least in the same room with each other. All of the players (except one) control an actor in a television show. (This character is referred to as either an "actor", "character", or "cast member" intermittently throughout these rules. They all mean about the same thing.) The other player controls everyone and everything else as well as describes the settings, determines the results of the cast's actions, and pretty much knows the whole plot of the episode before the others start to play. As this is a game that is about a television show, we're tempted to call this player something cute like "the Director" or "the Executive Producer" or "the Gene Roddenberry", but we'll call him "the GM" instead. ("The JMS" would work in a pinch.)

All the people that aren't the GM are referred to as "players", even though the GM is playing the game with everyone else. Role-playing game terminology is pretty silly that way.

1.3 Set Up

On a botched attempt at rescuing a stranded vessel, the crew is mistaken for pirates. Can they prove their innocence to the

system authorities before the third moon rise?

Each player chooses a character sheet (or creates his or her own cast member using the incredibly simple actor creation rules that follow). The other characters aren't used in this episode. Separate the plot cards from the script cards and place both decks face down in the center of the table. You'll also need a couple six-sided dice and some markers to keep track of how much star power the actor has.

The script deck contains 36 cards, all of which can be used to help your cast member outshine the others or add complications to the plots. Each player gets to draw five of these cards. With a full cast of six people, six of these cards will not be used.

If you have more cast members than six, go ahead and divvy up the cards so everyone has the same amount.

For this version of the game, there's just some squares you can cut out and use as cards. If this was created for something called "7 Day RPG", these would be actual cards with artwork and everything.

1.4 About Actors

The HMSS Xerxes, needing repairs after a battle with the K'lipsian Armada, stop over at a recreation planet where the entertainers are not all they appear.

Each character sheet has the name of the character on the show, a portrait and short description of the character, the actor's statistics, and a special ability the actor has.

Acting! shows how well your actor can deliver lines. If you need to spew forth some technobabble because the ship's hypermatter condenser coil is about to rupture, argue your innocence before an intergalactic tribunal of higher beings, or

just need to get a computer to define 'love' so it'll self-destruct, this is the statistic you'll be using.

Action! shows how convincing your actor is during fight scenes. It also works to resolve any tasks that would rely on physical actions -- you'd use this to dodge the styrofoam rocks the stagehands dressed up as yetis throw.

Hot! shows how telegenic your actor is. You'd also use this to complete tasks such as sweet-talking the guards over so the Commander can slug 'em or convincing the antagonist's number two to switch sides and help your crew out.

If you decide to create your own cast members, here's all you need to do. Take ten points and allot them to the three statistics making sure that none of them is greater than a five. Then pick one of the script deck cards and use that for your character's special ability. Or just make up your own special ability. Look, it's your game, so go ahead and make do with what you want to do.

1.5 Task Resolution

The HMSS Xerxes encounters the HMSS Heracles, long thought lost from Alliance Space. The commander of the Heracles has gone power-hungry and has used Alliance technology to make him the ruler of the Reynolds system.

Each actor's stats run from 1 to 5, representing the number of six-sided dice to be rolled when completing a task. When rolling dice, just get rid of any die that's higher than a two. Count what you've got left; this is the number of successes your character had.

If you're competing against another cast member (or one of the guest stars or extras), just see who got the most number of successes. If Commander Biff Manhunk is trying to shoot the time portal controls before the Space Mook can jump through,

both Manhunk's player and the GM roll Action! dice and compare totals.

If the task isn't opposed, the GM will decide the number of successes needed to complete a task successfully, using this as a guideline:

Difficulty	Number of Successes
Easy	2
Moderate	4
Hard	6
Difficult	8
Insane	10

"Easy", "Moderate", "Hard", "Difficult", and "Insane" are all left up to the discretion of the GM.

1.6 Initiative

Tired of running from the K'lipsian Armada, the HMSS Xerxes goes on the offensive, infiltrating part of the K'lipsian Stellar Net at Far Reach Outpost 14. But what they find on the outpost is completely unexpected.

Most games have rules for determining who goes first and allows everyone to act at least once during a "turn". We don't have any rules to determine who acts when except for this: If you say it, you get to do it.

If one player starts to say that their character is doing just seconds before another player begins to speak, the first player does it. If two players shout the exact same thing or want to take the same action at the same time, the GM can decide which one of them said it first or have the actors engage in an opposed test to see who gets to act.

Example

GM: ... as the K'lipsian moves towards you two, you hear Ensign Redshirt shout from the catwalk above, "Here! Catch this!" He tosses a laser zapgun down to you.

Player 1 and Player 2 [at the same time]: I catch the laser gun!

GM: Okay, this is an opposed Action! roll. Go.

[Player 1 rolls 1, 2, 5, 5, which is three successes. Player 2 rolls 1, 1, 1, which is three successes.]

GM: The two of you scramble for position to catch the zapgun, but wind up slamming into each other. The zapgun bounces off your hands and lands in front of the K'lipsian.

Player 1: "You idiot."

Player 2: "Jerk."

As you can see, this can be a loud game.

The GM can also decide that if a character isn't in the shot (that is, the actor isn't in the focus of attention at that point), the character cannot declare an action if it's unlikely that the actor would be able to influence the action. For instance, if the shot is the Commander wrestling a Frigidarian for the amusement of a brain floating in a jar while the crew is forced to watch, the GM would probably only allow actions for the Commander at this point. (An enterprising cast member can decide that's the time to overwhelm the guards, grab a ceremonial spear, and throw it at the Frigidarian just as it's about to kill the Commander, which the GM might allow.)

Oh, and there's no interrupting the GM. The GM has to be able to fully set the scene before the players can act on it.

1.7 Taking Damage

The HMSS Xerxes, heavily damaged from the events in "Initiative", is forced to return to the Reynolds system and explore the hulk of the HMSS Heracles in search of a vital ship component. But when they find out the Heracles isn't as derelict as she appears, all heck breaks loose.

Knocking other people out by punching or wrestling or Minarian Neck Strike generally is an opposed Action! test. If a cast member is knocked out, he'll come to near the end of the scene.

Laser zapguns are odd weapons. When shooting a mook, the mook gets killed instantly. When a mook shoots a cast member, the cast member winces in pain and holds his hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry," the cast member usually says. "I wasn't hurt that badly." He probably also has fallen to the floor. Until the next scene, the cast member only counts ones as successes on Action! rolls.

Non-mooks don't get killed right away from zapguns. A minor antagonist might get wounded, but they usually escape to go warn the major antagonist, using the rapidly-dying mooks as cover. Major antagonists might be shot up, but that never seems to do them in. As any science-fiction action fan knows, minor and major antagonists get their comeuppance. This means that if they're actually killed off, it's because they've been tricked onto a ship that's in a decaying orbit around a sun; the computer is trying to calculate the last digit of pi and blows up the station; the teleporter is rewired sending him to where the asteroid is supposed to crash into the planet instead of to his escape shuttle; or the cast members have convinced the robot slaves to overthrow their master. Lord Zarquath of the Torpidian Armada doesn't get killed off by shooting him in the back. He's got to go out with explosions. If you're a GM and the players really want to shoot Lord Zarquath in the big showdown, just use the next section to help Zarquath escape

for the next scene.

1.8 Back on the Railroad

The crew is blackmailed into a raid on a hover train carrying supplies on a mining planet. But the supplies they're forced to steal aren't exactly what they were told.

Railroading is an RPG term for a game scenario that forces players to only take one course of action. This is generally frowned upon in the gaming world as it removes the ability of players to do whatever they want to. However, as this is a game that emulates television show episodes that follow a basic plotline, the GM may feel free to railroad the other players as he or she sees fit. (In other words, if you want the Scientific Officer to miss Lord Zarquath with the zapgun even though he has ten successes -- bang and a miss!)

For instance, if the plot involves the ship's crew to show up for a diplomatic meeting and the room is filled with knockout gas in order for everyone to be captured, then the room fills with knockout gas and everyone is captured. If the players want to roll dice, let them. Most number of successes is the character that succumbs to the gas last and is the last one on camera, just as the ominous music plays and we cut to commercial.

1.9 Star Power

The HMSS Xerxes arrives at a research station, just after a K'plisian raiding party. There, they discover that the raiding party has the final piece needed to complete the Stellar Cannon. It's a race against time to stop the raiding party from rejoining the Armada.

In addition to surviving the episode, each player is trying to steal each scene. To do so, they've got to do something significant that makes for good television. Generally, this would be equivalent to a successful task roll, but not all the time. Take

combat against a bunch of space pirates. Shooting each individual pirate isn't as exciting as taking out the pirate captain, but taking out all the pirates at once with a Big Ol' ZapGun is.

Example

GM: The airlock door opens and suddenly six space pirates burst in and cover your crew at gunpoint. "We'll be taking your cargo, Commander," says the first one.

Player 1: I'm up on the catwalk with the huge gatling-zap gun at my hip. I'll open fire on the pirates. [rolls dice and gets ten successes].

GM: Okay. The zapgun buzzes and fires all around the cast members, hitting every single one of the pirates but the leader. All of the other pirates fall to the ground, dead.

Player 1: "All yours, Commander!"

Player 2 (Commander): I slug the leader. [rolls and wins the Action! test] "Get. Off. My. Ship." Pow!

GM: He goes flying back into the airlock.

In this example, both players would get 1 star point. If Player 1 wasn't up on the catwalk with the zapgun, and the other cast members started a free-for-all, they probably wouldn't get any star points as the main focus would have been on whatever the pirate leader was doing.

Here's a very short list about things that can get star points:

- Impassioned speech about something relevant to the plot.
- Technobabbling your way out of a cascading positronic core shutdown.

- Defeating a minor or major antagonist.
- Being the last one to pass out from the earlier-mentioned gas attack.
- Staging a comical diversion allowing the technician to sneak on board the K'lipsian vessel and plant the homing beacon.
- Planting a homing beacon in the K'lipsian vessel.
- Using your feminine wiles to seduce the keycodes to the technician's cell from the K'lipsian security officer.
- Defeating a group of K'lipsian mooks on the way out.

Important GM Note: Give out star points as they are earned. Do not wait until the end of the scene to award star points.

1.10 It's in the Cards

Back at the commerce planet, a Licansian Card-reader tricks the Commander and his crew into a dreamworld full of peril. Together with an old enemy, the crew must find a way to escape the dreamworld and return to the ship.

You'll notice your character starts out with five cards, each with something funny on them and some sort of game effect. You can play these at any time the GM is not talking. A card that counters or modifies a just-played card has to be played within a reasonable time -- generally a few seconds -- after the card it changes. The same goes for star point awards: cards that modify these have to be paid within a reasonable time after the star point is awarded.

At the end of the episode, if you have any cards left you may play them. If you don't, you don't.

1.11 Winning is Everything

The new and improved HMSS Heracles appears to hunt down the Xerxes, but the crews of both ships are transported to a deserted planet by a higher intelligence and forced to battle each other to the death.

Unlike most every other roleplaying game out there, there's actually a winner to Scene Stealer. At the end of the episode, play any cards you can, then add up the number of star points your character has. Whomever has the most number of points is the winner.

1.12 Other People

The crew of the HMSS Xerxes are knocked unconscious upon arrival on a moon outpost. When they come to, they find they've been duplicated and must find the real them before they can escape.

When determining what types of people (or creatures) will oppose the cast members, we look at them in basic groups.

“Mooks” are your basic military forces, the waves after waves of alien oppressors that the crew members have to overcome. They're generally nuisances, nothing more. All Mooks have Acting!, Action!, and Hot! skills of 2.

Mooks have a special ability called a “Mook Mob”. When a bunch of Mooks are doing pretty much the same thing, just roll once for them and use that result for all of the individual mooks. For example, the cast members are running from a platoon of mind-controlled slaves and the twenty or so slaves fire zapguns at the fleeing cast members. Instead of rolling two dice twenty times, just roll the two dice once and use that result for all twenty of them. (Okay, it's not really a special ability, it's something to make the game move a lot faster.)

“Minor Adversaries” or “Important People That Aren't People to Fight Against” or “Minor Threats” have all three skills at 3. Certain people might have one of the skills at 4. These would be the second-in-command of the HMSS Heracles or some Giant Robot that guards the Computer or even the Princess' long-lost brother

“Major Adversaries” might have all three skills at 5. These are the hard-to-kill villains of the episode: The Space Pirate leader, the K'lipsian Armada Admiral. That sort of thing.

1.13 Yet Another Adventure

The HMSS Xerxes stops at an asteroid base for repairs but the crew is captured by the minions of The Computer and are forced to play a virtual reality game where their sanity is at stake.

This is a familiar section for anyone that has read through a role-playing game before. It's the section that's full of advice about creating your own adventures. It's also the section that signals we're getting to the end of the game book.

We're not going to do that. You want adventure ideas? Take a look at your *Star Trek*, your *Babylon 5*, your *Blake's 7*, your *Farscape*. Take a look at *Thunderbirds*, *Andromeda*, or *Stargate SG-1* (or *Atlantis*, if you will). Go and buy the boxed DVD set of *Firefly*. (That's just good advice even if you aren't going to play this game. *Firefly* is awesome, man.) If you're still stuck for ideas, take a look at the headers used in this game. The bit that's in italics below it is a blurb about what might be in an episode. Clever, no?

We're also not ending the game book here. Well, there's the cards and the characters sheets, but there's also the bit I stole from *Above the Earth*. That's coming up next.

1.14 The Colophon

The HMSS Xerxes encounters the Colophon, the flagship of the K'plisian Armada, adrift in a dense asteroid field. As the crew explores the wreckage, they stumble across what destroyed this warship.

The title typeface is CCTimelordSolid, created by the fine folks at Comicraft. Once free, you've now gotta buy it. The text typeface is Futura Lt BT (with some Futura Md BT here and there), which came with the computer. This was written in Open Office 1.1.3, a fine text editor that's available at openoffice.org. No music was listened to during the creation of this document, although I did listen to some drum and bass stuff on the way home.

The game is based a bit off of *Tim Traveller*, another science-fiction "actors as characters" game. That's written by Tim Oldfield and is available at 24hourrpg.com.

During the initial creation of this game, it was going to be an entry into the 24 Hour RPG challenge, then a card game, then back to the RPG thing. I still might make a card game out of it.

This thing took about 14 hours to complete, including a break to go work out and eat dinner and watch an episode of *Lost*.

Oh, go check out my comics at thesnakefarm.com .

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1.15 Some Assembly Required

The crew discovers a planet entirely populated with androids. But when an android is discovered destroyed, suspicion falls upon the crew of the HMSS Xerxes.

Unfortunately, I can't really create all the cards in this format, so we'll have to make do with strips of paper. Each "card" will be on strips of paper that you'll cut out. Place all 36 strips into a hat or some other paper holder and each player draws five strips of paper. You want actual cards? Do that "7 Day RPG" thing instead.

Following the card pages are the six character sheets. Cut each page in half or tear 'em or whatever. Look, it's getting late.

Fan Service: A cast member is shown in revealing clothes or in some nearly-naked shot. If played on a male cast member, the male fanbase questions their sexuality; remove one star point from that player. If played on a female cast member, that player gets two star points. "Sorry Princess -- I didn't realize you were in the sonic shower."

Bon Mot: Deliver a witticism after [1] someone else defeats an adversary in combat and steal the star point reward from that player, or [2] you defeat an adversary (or mook) to gain one additional star point. "That'll put the Frigidarians on ice!"

Selective Editing: In post-production the editing department alters the footage of what just happened. Change the target of the just-played card to whomever you choose. This cannot be played to counter another Selective Editing card. "See, we just add a laser blast to the Technician's zapgun and voila! She shot the blast door closed instead of him!"

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Selective Editing: In post-production the editing department alters the footage of what just happened. Change the target of the just-played card to whomever you choose. This cannot be played to counter another Selective Editing card. "See, we just add a laser blast to the Doctor's zapgun and voila! She shot the blast door closed instead of him!"

Not Dead Yet!: After defeating a bunch of mooks or an antagonist, the villain gets up to shoot one of the cast members. Luckily, you're there to deliver the final blow and save the other cast member. Give yourself a star point. "Look out, Commander!"

Cliffhanger!: At the end of the episode, reveal that your character is pregnant. Or that he's been kidnapped and the you with the crew is really an android clonebot! Or both! Give yourself a star point. "To be continued..."

On a Bender Last Night: Play on another cast member. This actor was out drinking all night and has forgotten his lines. He has half of his Acting! skill, rounded up, until the next scene. "Space, the final... final... Line!"

Back's Acting Up Again: Play on another cast member. This actor slept wrong last night and wrenched her back all out of shape. She has half of her Action! skill, rounded up, until the next scene. "Where's my stuntwoman?"

Broke Up With the Make-Up Artist: Play on another cast member. This actor's not-so-secret on-set affair with the make-up artist ended badly last night. The actor has half of his Hot! skill, rounded up, until the next scene. "Cut! Can someone tell me why the Doctor looks jaundiced today?"

Supplemental Steroids: Play on any cast member. This actor gets two extra Action! dice for the remainder of the episode. "I feel like I can punch through walls! Ow!"

Studied with Shatner: Play on any cast member. This actor gets two extra Acting! dice for the remainder of the episode. "To be... or. Not. To-be."

Made Up With the Make-Up Artist: Play on any cast member. This actor gets two extra Hot! dice for the remainder of the episode. "Cut! Can someone tell me why the Princess' breasts are so shiny today?"

Strategic Commerical Break!: Play when there's something suspenseful you're doing. When the show comes back from the break, the camera is focused on you, and you get an extra star point. "We'll be right back."

Breaking News!: The show was interrupted by a special news report, so that last bit didn't get aired. Remove the most recent star point reward(s). "Giant radioactive lizard attacks coastal metropolis, and Action Five News is there!"

Sorry, You're Not In This Scene: Play on any cast member and they've been written out of the next scene. "Where's Jensen?"

Pantyhose on the Camera Lens: Play on any cast member. This cast member automatically passes the next Hot! task he or she attempts. "Damn I'm good... looking."

Dramatic Music: Play on any cast member. This cast member automatically passes the next Action! task he or she attempts. "By the seven moons, that was inspirational!"

Good Rewrite: Play on any cast member. This cast member automatically passes the next Acting! task he or she attempts. "I've been studying with Shatner."

Damn Space Crickets: Play on any cast member. There was some background noise during that scene, requiring the actor to loop dialogue in post-production. Unfortunately, the magic of the moment is gone. Remove an Acting!-related star point from this actor. "chirp... chirp..."

Black Level: Play on any cast member. The lighting on this actor's close-up washed out the screen. Remove a Hot!-related star point from this actor. "Whoa. Someone adjust the contrast."

Continuity Error: Play on any cast member. The way that rip on your costume seems to move from one spot to another depending on the camera angle makes your big fight scene one of the funniest things ever. Remove an Action!-related star point from this actor. "Dude, check it out! It's here, now it's there! It's here, now it's there! It's here, now it's there!"

Cheap Special Effects: Play on any cast member. The horrible special effects in that shot detract from your performance. Remove a star point from this actor. "Dude, you can totally see the strings on the model."

Cheap Special Effects: Play on any cast member. The horrible special effects in that shot detract from your performance. Remove a star point from this actor. "Dude, you can totally see that rock wobble when they walk by it."

Cheap Special Effects: Play on any cast member. The horrible special effects in that shot detract from your performance. Remove a star point from this actor. "Dude, that guy's helmet is my toaster!"

Focus on Me!: Play at any time. The camera focuses on your character for the next few minutes. Because you're getting all this screen time, everything else that is going on appears in the background. Gain two star points. "And... zoom in on Ensign Jensen... and hold it... and hold it..."

Guest Starring... Me!: Play at any time. You're also playing a secondary role in this next scene, placed in the shot using a split screen effect. Gain one star point. "No, I'm the anti-Doctor from the anti-Dimension come to warn you about the K'lipsian Armada!"

Guest Starring... Shatner!: Play at any time. Shatner has a cameo with your character. Gain one star point. "To be... or. Not. To-be."

Dramatic Tension: Play after getting a star point for Acting! Get an additional star point. "To be! Or not! To be!"

Mackin' with the Hot Alien: Play after getting a star point for Hot! Get an additional star point. "Do you know how hard it is to get green lipstick off my collar?"

The Ol' One-Two!: Play after getting a star point for Action! Get an additional star point. "I kicked his ass all the way to Uranus."

Smash Cut: Automatically pass any Action!, Acting!, or Hot! test. Receive no star points for passing it. "What just happened?"

Bad Editing: Due to a snafu in the editing room, it looks like a different cast member did that. Reassign the just-awarded star point to anyone else. "What the? But I blasted the escape pod!"

Bribe the Writers: Play after getting getting a star point for Acting! Get an additional star point. "To be or not? To be!"

That's "Captain Tight Pants" To You: Play after getting a star point for Hot! Get an additional star point. "Is that a zapgun in your pocket or are you happy to see me?"

I Do My Own Stunts: Play after getting a star point for Action! Get an additional star point. "Whoa. My arm's on fire."

Commander Biff Manhunk, square-jawed leading man.

Acting! 2

Action! 4

Hot! 4

Special Ability: Shirtless Manhunk

Once per episode, Manhunk's shirt can be ripped after a successful Action! task to get an additional star point (Hot!). "I didn't learn this back in the Academy!"

Princess Voluptia, sexy alien princess.

Acting! 3

Action! 2

Hot! 5

Special Ability: Low Cut Robes

Once per episode, Voluptia can get an additional star point after a successful Hot! task. "You Earthers are so embarrassed by nudity."

Ensign Jensen, hapless peon.

Acting! 4

Action! 3

Hot! 3

Special Ability: Catch Phrase

Once per episode, Jensen can get an additional star point after a successful Acting! task. "That's why they made me Ensign!"

Doctor Malarkey, non-sexy alien scientific officer.

Acting! 5

Action! 2

Hot! 2

Special Ability: Minarian Neck Strike

Once per episode, the Doctor can make an unarmed attack that instantly knocks out a target to get an additional star point. No roll needed. "It's life, Biff, but not as we know it."

Kaylee Tinker, ship's engineer.

Acting! 4

Action! 3

Hot! 3

Special Ability: Technobabble.

Once per episode, Tinker can gain an additional star point after a successful Acting! or Action! task that involves technology or some mechanical device. "I've de-frammed the halcyon drive, but unless we can reflash the polarized negatronic catalysts, we can't make the jump to hyperspeed!"

Lars Gunnut, brutish security officer.

Acting! 2

Action! 5

Hot! 3

Special Ability: Gun Happy

Once per episode, Gunnut can gain an additional star point after a successful Acting! or Action! task that involves weapons of any kind. "I call this one 'Winona'."