

# Ray Guns and Rocket Ships

1st draft

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## Abstract

RG&RS is a space opera campaign in the tradition of comic strips and movie serials of the 1930s and TV series of the 1950s.

## 1 The Setting

It is the 111th century.

Back to the future: Transistors never replaced vacuum tubes. A computer is a *person* who performs calculations. Spaceships are gleaming, streamlined, and sport fins like a 1950s automobile. Everyone in the galaxy speaks English.<sup>1</sup>

Mankind has explored the Solar system and has begun exploring Sol's interstellar neighborhood.

Two superpowers dominate this region of the galaxy: Tellus<sup>2</sup> and Xingo.

Fifty years ago, the Tellurians<sup>3</sup> and the Xingoans fought the INTERSTELLAR WAR, which ended in an uneasy stalemate.

After the war, the Tellurians and their allies established the LEAGUE OF FREE PLANETS.

Emperor Ving still desires to add the League worlds to his XINGOAN EMPIRE. Hostilities flare up on occasion, but Ving knows it would be a futile waste of resources to restart the war in earnest unless he can first gain some advantage.

## 2 Player Characters

The PCs are members of the League's STAR PATROL. The Patrol serves as police, scouts, spies, special forces, and many other roles. Their ranks include the brightest graduates of the ACADEMY, veterans of the SPACE MARINES or STELLAR NAVY, and worthies from many other backgrounds.

<sup>1</sup>To be more accurate, this campaign considers language a detail below its level of abstraction. The availability of a common language, universal translator, Babel fish, or some other expediant is constantly assumed.

<sup>2</sup>Sol III, a.k.a. the Earth.

<sup>3</sup>Inhabitants of the planet Tellus, a.k.a. humans.

RG&RS is not a game of advancing character abilities. RG&RS characters may earn promotions<sup>4</sup>, acquire<sup>5</sup> gadgets, gain<sup>6</sup> power and fame, win<sup>7</sup> love, etc. Throughout it all, however, their character abilities may never change.

## 2.1 Background

The most important aspect of a RG&RS character is its background and personality. RG&RS characters should generally be archetypal and colorful. They may be cliché, eccentric, or outlandish. Their backgrounds may be fantastic or exotic. They do tend to be, however, rather one dimensional.

## 2.2 Classes

Each player character has a class. The character classes are:

- Hero (Hro)
- Heroine (Hne)
- Scientist (Sci)
- Technician (Tec)
- Alien (Ali)

Note that referee characters and monsters may not fit within these character classes.

## 2.3 Abilities

Characters have the following abilities:

**Athletics** Running, jumping, climbing, swimming and other physical activities.

**Fight** Hand to hand combat, with or without weapons.

**Luck** Used when no other ability applies.

<sup>4</sup>or demotions

<sup>5</sup>or lose

<sup>6</sup>or lose

<sup>7</sup>or lose

**Pilot** Operating spacecraft, aircraft, watercraft, and groundcars.

**Repair** Operating and repairing technological apparatus.

**Science** Scientific knowledge and expertise.

**Shoot** Firing weapons.

Each ability has a rating determined by class.

Ability	Hro	Hne	Sci	Tec	Ali
Athletics	9	8	5	6	7
Fight	9	7	5	6	8
Luck	3	3	3	3	3
Pilot	7	8	5	9	9
Repair	5	4	7	9	8
Science	4	5	9	7	4
Shoot	8	9	6	7	7

When a character has a chance of failing at something, the player makes an ability test. The referee must decide which ability applies. The referee may impose modifiers to the character's ability rating based on the situation. The player then rolls two dice<sup>8</sup>. If the total of the two dice is less than or equal to the modified ability rating, the character succeeds.

## 2.4 Gadgets and Gear

The Patrol assigns each officer:

- A space suit
- A ray gun
- A hand communicator

Patrol ray guns are pistol sized and have nearly unlimited range. While a ray gun will easily harm most creatures and primitive vehicles, it is too weak to damage powered vehicles.

A hand communicator's range is roughly equal to twice the diameter of Tellus.

The Patrol assigns each team:

- A rocket ship
- A portable ray cannon

The standard Patrol rocket ship can carry up to ten people comfortably. It has ray cannons mounted in a belly turret and a top turret. There is also a ray cannon in the nose that can be fired by the pilot.

A portable ray cannon has either a dipod or tripod. It takes a round to set up before it can be fired.

<sup>8</sup>RG&RS uses only normal, ubiquitous, run-of-the-mill, six-sided dice.

Ray cannon can damage powered vehicles. Against primitive vehicles or ordinary creatures, a cannon gets two attack rolls per attack<sup>9</sup>.

The referee should devise new gadgets for the character's to be assigned, encounter, or discover.

## 3 Personal Combat

Combat is resolved in *rounds* of about three seconds each. Each round, the player characters take their turns, then the referee characters take their turns.

On his turn, a character may do anything a person could typically do in three seconds subject to referee approval. A character may only make one attack per round.

### 3.1 Attacks

To hit an opponent with:

- A ray gun or other ranged weapon  
Make a Shoot test
- A fist, kick, or hand-to-hand weapon  
Make a Fight test
- A thrown weapon  
Make *both* a Shoot & Athletics test

### 3.2 Hits

The first hit a character takes is *just a scratch*. A character with *just a scratch* goes *down* when he takes a second hit.

Once a character with *just a scratch* has been bandaged, which takes about five minutes, the character is considered at full health again.

A character who is *down* remains unconscious until another character tends to him. Ten minutes of tending is usually enough. A character who is not tended to will eventually recover consciousness on his own at the referee's discretion.

Note that some referee characters and monsters may not follow these rules. Evil minions will typically go *down* with a single hit. Arena monsters may require many hits or may be immune to hits altogether!

<sup>9</sup>Note that it is two *rolls*, not two *attacks*. The two rolls represent only a single, more powerful attack.

## 4 Vehicle Combat

Vehicle combat is resolved in *rounds* of unspecified time<sup>10</sup>. Range bands of unspecified size<sup>11</sup> are used to keep track of the distance between vehicles. The range bands are:

- Very Short
- Short
- Medium
- Long
- Very Long

### 4.1 Piloting

On his turn, a pilot may make a Pilot test in order to:

**Close Range** If successful, the range between the pilot's vehicle and the vehicle being pursued is reduced by one range band. If already at Very Short range, the pilot has rammed the pursued vehicle.

**Open Range** If successful, the range between the pilot's vehicle and the pursuing vehicle is increased by one range band. If already at Very Long range, then the pilot's vehicle has escaped pursuit.

**Dodge** Any attacks made against the pilot's vehicle between this turn and the pilot's next turn are at -2.

### 4.2 Gunnery

A gunner, on his turn, may make a Shoot test in order to attack another vehicle.

Range	Modifier
Very Short	0
Short	-1
Medium	-2
Long	-4
Very Long	-8

### 4.3 Damage

The first hit a vehicle takes has no effect other than to cause it to start smoking or otherwise show signs of damage. It is considered *hit*. The second hit, however, will *disable* the vehicle. The pilot may make a Pilot test to keep it from *crashing*. If a vehicle crashes, all its passengers will be *down*.

<sup>10</sup>The referee can decide how long a particular round is if it becomes important.

<sup>11</sup>If the specific size of the range bands should become important, the referee will determine them based on the vehicles involved and the specific situation.

### 4.4 Repairs

A *crashed* vehicle is destroyed and cannot be repaired. After an hour of work, a successful Repair test will make a *disabled* vehicle only *hit*. After thirty minutes of work, a successful Repair test will fully repair a *hit* vehicle.

## 5 Referee Characters

Here are a few RCs the PCs might encounter:

### Patrol Commander Ulysses J. Corbett

The patrol has only four ranks: cadet, officer, base commander, and patrol commander. The head of the Patrol and commander of Prime Base on Tellus is Patrol Commander Ulysses J. Corbett.

Commander Corbett is ancient and tough as nails. He wears a patch over his left eye, the ends of a scar visible above and below it. His right arm is mechanical. He is ruggedly handsome with his still thick white hair worn in an immaculate pompadour. Although he projects the intensity of a drill sergeant, he has a smiling gleam in his eyes.

The Commander's straight talking, no-nonsense attitude keeps him in constant trouble with politicians throughout the League. In the end, though, there isn't a politician around who would want anyone else in command of the Patrol.

### Emporer Ving

The bald, goateed ruler of the evil Xingoan Empire. He's a megalomaniac who believes it is his destiny to rule the universe. He truly believes that he has a gift of supreme intelligence and that it is therefore his *duty* to take control. Despite his intelligence, he has a knack for choosing incompetent delegates.

### Princess Xaura

Although as megalomaniacal as her father, Princess Xaura will happily leave the ruling of the universe to him. She is selfishness incarnate. The universe exists only to satisfy her whims. She does not, however, make demands of her father. Ving expects her to take what she wants herself.

## 6 Refereeing

RG&RS sessions should be light, action-filled melodrama. They should be a wild ride. Always be on the look out for opportunities for a chase scene or an encounter with a fantastic monster or for the villain to capture the PCs. These adventures should take place against the most exotic locales the galaxy has to offer.

Adventures typically start with patrol HQ ordering the PCs to patrol a particular area or investigate something. “Fantastic new technology” can be a useful McGuffin. The greater the peril should the PCs fail, the better. The nature or extent of the peril, however, may remain hidden for some time.

Distance, speed, and other such details should be glossed over. How fast does the starship travel? At the speed of plot. How long will it take to get there? However long provides the most dramatic tension.

## 7 Physics

The physics of RG&RS differ greatly from those of our world.

The speed of light (and other forms of radiation) is infinite.

Electromagnetic radiation, including light, is a wave. Its medium is the *ether*, an intangible substance that permeates the void.<sup>12</sup>

Technology has been developed to harness COSMIC ENERGY.<sup>13</sup>

Since energy can now be extracted from the void, and since energy can be converted into matter,<sup>14</sup> rocketships no longer need to carry massive quantities of propellant.

Note, however, that this doesn't mean *replicators* exist. Creating some hydrogen to use for propellant is one thing. Creating earl gray tea is something else entirely.

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<sup>12</sup>So, I guess it can't truly be called “the void.” Oh, well. I'm calling it that anyway.

<sup>13</sup>Current research into *zero point energy* seems not wholly unlike the *cosmic energy* of the *Lensman* stories of E. E. “Doc” Smith, written in the 1930s!

<sup>14</sup>If  $e = mc^2$  and  $c = \infty$ , can energy be converted into matter? Good thing this isn't hard sci-fi!