

Pulp Adventures in a Hard Solar System

By Stefan Livingstone Shirley

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Pulp Adventures in a Hard Solar System

The idea is this; Pulp and Noir are set in the real world; this is set in an at least semi-realistic sci-fi world. Near future; interplanetary travel not interstellar travel (yet, I plan on getting there); "slug" throwers, not laser pistols; no terraforming (yet)...

Technology I think is appropriate includes: clones, gene therapy and splicing, cyberspace, and any cutting edge technology available now taken up a few notches. No "cold sleep" though. Not quite as high a tech level as Transmetropolitan, but pretty close to that of Blade Runner.

While I don't generally read or watch them, multi-generational epics have always intrigued me from an RP standpoint. Whether or not I ever run this game long enough for such things remains to be seen. However, the setting does include a history and a future. The past includes Atlantis and Lovecraft Country, while the future holds jump gates and first alien contacts. This is [Risus](#), so I'll paint in broad enough strokes that it can be played for laughs or cutting satire, or even gasp played as serious as Roy Batty.

Antagonists (or Protagonists, depends on your point of view.)

The Corporation(s): They own everything you know? They manufacture all the props and "Tools of the Trade." They are the banks and the resort hotels. They are the new feudal lords of a solar system in decline.

The Terran Federal Government (TFG): After China made it into space and US policies of nuclear blackmail coerced the UN into line. ..Well, things changed; martial law got the "home of the brave" through a couple of elections while US money and Chinese manpower put the first colonies on the Moon and Mars. The EEC community opened space to the average Joe, though. The colony ships Rutan and Branson headed out to Jupiter and firmly established themselves as a new power within only a few decades.

Obligatory Psychic Conspiracy: At the upper levels of the FTG and a handful of Corporations there exists the beginning of a web of intrigue that stretches beyond the Asteroid Belt. Its limits are unknown, and its existence is a ruthlessly maintained secret. ..Be sure to know where your foil beanie is...

The Lunar Revolutionary Front/League/Coalition/Alliance/Confederacy/et. al.: Eventually all those colonies on all those moons got tired of the imperialist charlatans and "Yankee Traders" of the TFG and The Corporations. The TFG wasted no time in stomping on the embers of revolt though. When nukes were fired at Io, the Jupiter colonies joined the fray. In the end the superior resources of the TFG won the day though. Now the revolution is in pieces; scattered and distrustful.

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Edgers & Belters & Plutos, Oh My!: In the Asteroid Belt, on the moons of Uranus and Neptune, and even as far away as Pluto there are those who refuse to acknowledge the existence or power of the TFG. These are homesteaders, spacefareing Bedouins, and bandits. In some cases "Green Ships" eke out an existence moving from port to port throughout the solar system selling genetically engineered exotic fruits and vegetables. Ever seen a tomato grown in zero gravity?

Crazed Cultists: In bygone eons dark gods from before time ruled the infant universe. As worlds like Earth were born their power waned, but their memory remained. Today there are mortals touched by these beings. Foul cults worship and sacrifice to their forbidden masters in an effort to return the primordial gods to power. Ia! Ia!

And what of the rumors of some dread intelligence under the surface of Pluto? Who or what is Yuggoth?

I leave the actual Eldritch Horrors honored by the Crazed Cultists to the twisted minds of the GMs. Given the interplanetary nature of this game, some possibilities should become immediately apparent to a Call of Cthulhu RPG fan.

Rules

Go to the official site and download [Risus](#) now. We'll be here when you get back.

Ok. I love [Risus](#). I love vanilla ice cream. I love vanilla ice cream with Oreo crumbs even more. [Risus](#) with Advanced Options is like that. It is the difference between your favorite ice cream, and your favorite ice cream *with your favorite topping mixed right in!*

I recommend purchasing your [Risus](#) Companion today. Personally, I would use Lucky Shots & Questing Dice, Sidekicks and Shield-Mates, and Boxcars & Breakthroughs. I'm less sure of Eye of the Tiger, but I think it would likely fit in fine, too.

I have a couple of House Rules that I need to explain here. First and simplest is that I will use the Sidekick and Shield-Mates rules for the PCs' ship as well. Whoever contributes the most dice becomes the ships owner and/or captain, but all the "ship" dice go into a pool that the GM will use to create the ship in a manner similar to an NPC. Let's face it The Enterprise, The Millennium Falcon, The Serenity... They were all characters in their own ways. Of course, a ship with an AI might be a PC itself!

Next is a minor Rescaling and what I call "The Funkiest Die." The Rescaling is as follows: 4 a cinch, 8 a challenge for a pro, 15 a heroic challenge, 20 a challenge for a master, etc.

The Funkiest Die

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The much maligned and presumably lonely d4... I incorporated the d4 to provide a scale of NPC below the PCs without using single d6s consistently. The d4 represents the average mook or citizen, while the d6 and above represent the heroic PCs and truly nasty villains that fate dictates they oppose.

All those other Funky Dice

Pulp Adventures in a Hard Solar System uses the d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12. Such GM nightmares as the d20 and d30 are not used. Honest. Tentacles? Tentacled Horror [5d20]? I don't know what you are talking about. Perhaps we need to increase your dosage.

Double-Pumping on the first d8... wait, no...

Double-Pumping works almost as normal, except that Double-Pump Clichés start using the d8 instead of the d6.

Which brings us to Character Generation

Players can not purchase Funky Dice at Character Generation, except where noted above. The die pool still consists of 10 dice as normal (plus any bonus dice for Hooks & Tales). I recommend requiring Hooks & Tales bonus dice be spent on Double- Pumps, Lucky Shots, Questing Dice, Ships, Sidekicks, or Shield-Mates.

There are a couple of different ways to spread the 10 dice around that I recommend. 3,3,2,2 or 4,2,2,2. If you are not playing this specifically for laughs, I don't recommend the use of the "Classic Countdown" of 4,3,2,1. That Cliché (1) is apt to be more of a curse in a serious game than a help. However, if I was running the game for laughs I would *require* a cliché of (1)!

Alternatively, you might make that 1 die Cliché something like this:

Captain Rip "Cord" MacCordian:

Capt. Cord has put a lot of work in to his reputation as a horrible morning person. He has carefully cultivated this reputation for many years to no avail.

Tramp Bulk Freighter Captain (4), Womanizing Gambler (3), Gunslinger (2), Cranky Morning Person (1)

The Cliché with only one die does not necessarily have to be a "positive" trait that they suck at, but a "negative" trait they suck at. Capt. Cord is actually a pretty friendly and chipper person in the morning, but he tries to give the impression that he isn't.

And yes, [d8] and (2d6) cost the same for PCs *at character generation*.

Speaking of Clichés...

<http://www.guyhoyle.net/risus/PulpCliches.htm>

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My philosophy is, “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” Guy Hoyle’s list of Pulp Clichés works just fine for this setting with very little alteration. Different GMs will want to exclude certain Clichés, and some might only be appropriate if you decide Mars and/or Venus have native life. If that’s your thing go for it! In particular I recommend the Weird Stories, Villains, Crime Does Not Pay, Western, and (most of the) General Clichés.

Version 2.1: I’ve added a modified list of these pulpy clichés as an appendix.

<http://www.guyhoyle.net/risus/>

Check out the rest of the site, too!

The only thing I need to add is the specific clichés that require Double-Pumps.

Telepath (communicating with only your mind, mind reading, being slightly touched)

Telekinetic (impersonating a poltergeist, choking people, possibly starting fires)

Medium (seeing things that aren’t there, talking to dead relatives, wearing black)

Cult Sorcerer/Priest/Poobah (violating natural law like a frat boy crashing a HS prom, insane cackling, summoning powers that ought not be summoned)

My vision of psychic activity in general is inspired very much by Babylon 5 and Firefly.

If you are stumped for clichés checkout the other fan sites on the list at the official [Risus](http://www.guyhoyle.net/risus/) site. Also get the damn Companion already! It will only add to your enjoyment of the game.

GM Section

Funky Dice: Important GM characters/challenges/etc. are built with 60- 72 points. Dice available are d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12 *only* (and handfuls of d20s for those things that cultists tend to call up without a plan for putting down). Characters with d4s represent the average citizen, while heroes (like the PCs) are d6s. In general, a single cliché of 1 to 5 dice represents unnamed NPCs. Sometimes a named civilian might be required who won't compete with or outshine the PCs. In these cases the GM is encouraged to build such characters with 10-12 d4s.

Funky Rules of Thumb:

- 1) PCs do not receive Funky Dice at Character Generation (except as previously noted).
- 2) NPCs will not generally have more than one Funky cliché.
- 3) It might be helpful to think of it like this:

Citizen or Mook	d4
Hero or Named Thug	d6
Psychics and Masterminds	d8
Genetic Monstrosity	d10
Eldritch Horror	d12

The d8 or d10 might be just the thing for that Archvillian at the end of a story, too.

Appendix I

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Boxcars & Breakthroughs: When I posted a question to the [Risustalk](#) mailing list about this combination of Advanced Options, they were all nice enough to ignore me. I suspected that meant I had probably not read the Companion closely enough. Sure enough, when I went back to review it my answer was waiting for me. Sorry guys.

Due to the Rescaling explained previously, I believe it will be necessary to change a “Boxcar” to a 4 (instead of a 6). The Boxcar & Breakthroughs rule remains unchanged. (These rules appear in full in the Risus Companion. In short if all of your dice come up “Boxcars” then you have experienced a “Breakthrough” and may role again, adding the result.)

Alternatively, the GM might rule that a boxcar is whatever a die’s highest value is (4, 6, 8, 10, 12) *or* It’s still 6 and d4 norms are out in the cold.

[Ships,] Sidekicks, and Shield-Mates: Each player who is a crew (party) member on a ship may spend dice on said Ship. Each player can buy a separate cliché for the ship. Lucky Shots may also be bought for this ship using the player's dice bought (rather than the dice spent).

Example: The first player splurges on the parties ship and spends 1 regular die, and both bonus dice on the ship (at three dice spent in total he looks like a shoe in for ship’s owner and captain):

Tramp Freighter Full of Surprises (3), Quirky AI (3), Heavy Duty Shields 5*, Lucky Shots 3, Concealed Compartments (1).

The player spent 3 of their dice to buy 9 dice for the ship.

The second character is playing the crew mechanic, but only drops 1 for:

Highly Modified Engine that only I and God can keep running [1], Redundant Backup systems 5.*

The player spent 1 of their dice to buy 3 dice for the ship.

And so on, but as of now we have: Tramp Freighter Full of Surprises (3), Quirky AI (3), Concealed Compartments (1), Highly Modified Engine that only I and God can keep running [1], Redundant Backup systems 5*, Heavy Duty Shields 5* Lucky Shots 3.

*Represented by Questing Dice. In the case of the shields, these may only be used in asteroid fields and ship-to-ship combats. The "Backup Systems" are only for emergency engine repairs, usually on the move.

Sidekicks & Shield-mates is from the Risus Companion. Briefly, a player may exchange dice of their own to create an allied NPC (or in this case, a ship). This exchange is on a 1 to 3 ratio.

Sample characters and ships:

- Loyal TFG Citizen (3d4)
- Inhuman(e) Space Pirate Captain (3d8)
- TFG Interceptor Craft (1d10)
- Super Soldier run amok (3d10)

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- Fenster S. Pigeon, "The Fence": Fence(4d4), Stool Pigeon(3d4), Rumormonger (2d4), Upstanding Citizen (1d4). ..Two 3d Thugs, or one 6d gang; depends on season and situation.
- Elder God Called Up By Mad Cultist [5d20], Innocent Catholic School Girl (d4)¹

Appendix II

Noir-ish Sci-Fi Influences²: Movies & TV: Red Dwarf, Cowboy Bebop, Outland, Blade Runner, Slipstream, Firefly, maybe the Aliens movies, Akira, Patlabor, Appleseed... Novels (or short stories) by Alexander Jablakov, Philip K. Dick, H.P. Lovecraft...

I obviously recommend The Risus Companion, but it isn't strictly necessary. The rules from it that are used are simple enough to require little explanation. I use for reference and inspiration d20 Modern and d20 Future as well. Most d20 products are readily available and all those classes are easily adapted to clichés. Other sci-fi games with a greater or lesser amount of influence include Star Wars (WEG), Red Dwarf (Deep 7), Blue Planet (Biohazard), Cyberpunk 2020 (R. Talosorian), Star Trek (FASA), Star Frontiers (TSR), Kromosome (TSR), and probably a couple I just can't remember.



Brought to you by: I.O.R. Member #176.

Appendix the Third: Oh, that is so cliché!

What follows is a modified list stolen shamelessly from Guy Hoyle with only minor changes and additions.

¹ Hey, those Cultists are a twisted lot; what do you want?

² I trust I don't have to list actual Noir and detective fiction on this list. I mean, I've used the terms Noir and Pulp enough, no?

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Hacker: Virtual breaking and entering, changing grades, violating FCC regs, money laundering, war chalking

Stage Magician: sleight of hand, misdirection, the hand is quicker than the eye, sawing people in half without hurting them, make dramatic gestures, wear tuxedo and top hat, pull rabbit out of hat

Gold-digger: trade money for love, seduce the rich and elderly, disguise true nature, fall in love for real with hero.

Jaded millionaire playboy/girl: throws around lots of cash, seen it all, drink gallons of champagne, expect to be waited on

Circus Performer: walk tightrope, get shot out of cannon, swing from trapeze

Shell-shocked Veteran of The Colonial Wars: Terrified by loud noises, use rifles and bayonettes, reminisce about the war, nightmares

Movie Star: look glamorous, idolized by millions, sign autograph, memorize lines/blocking, party into the wee small hours, seduce

Stunt Man: survive a great fall, throw fake punch, escape from crashing vehicle, slide along a bar, look kinda like a movie star

Nosy Reporter: sniff out a scoop, drink like fish, smoke like chimney, bang out a story, protect sources, transcribe conversation

Aviator/Aviatrix: fly anything, tinker with engine, storm barns, make an emergency landing

Concert Pianist: Virtuoso Performance, nimble fingers, impeccable evening wear

Professional Athlete: run, swim, jump, throw, wrestle, be a good sport

Daredevil: Escape from crashing vehicle, drive or fly any vehicle, survive a great fall, leap across crevice, hang onto fedora

Lawman: Arrest criminals, interrogate criminals, drink gallons of bad coffee, smoke like a chimney, find donut shop

Linguist: Know obscure languages, translate ancient inscriptions, pronounce the unpronounceable

Stowaway or Hobo: hop tramp freighter, sing mournful songs, panhandle, do odd jobs, war chalking, drink anything alcoholic

Physician: Diagnose illness, make house call, treat disease, stitch up wound, prescribe remedy

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Psychiatrist: Ask pointless or infuriating questions, analyze neurosis, make everything relate to sex

TFG Soldier: clean rifle, fire rifle, know about tactics and strategy, sleep whenever you can, stay awake during guard duty, gloat at Colonials

Clergyman: long-winded, preachy, forgive sinners, sermonize

University student: Booze it up, chase the opposite sex, cram for test

World-weary gunslinger: never refuse a challenge, shoot from the hip, never settle down, drink plenty o' redevye, ride the range, Colonial sympathies

Saloon Girl: Have a heart of gold, "Buy a lady a drink, cowboy?", dance with ruffians, unspecified services, fall in love with handsome stranger

School Marm: Teach local kids and illiterate adults, hide true good looks, be prim and proper

Colonial: Protect lunar assets, hate Earth and all her rules, have beautiful daughter who's in love with someone you hate

Hard-Boiled Private Detective: broke all the time, never give up on a case, drink gallons of bad coffee, incorruptible, doggedly pursue clues

Criminal: Pistol-whip victims, brutalize victims, take it on the lam, never squeal, plan heist, steal things

Reformed Gangster: Old contacts, streetwise, keep nose clean, frequently suspected by police, not trusted by other crooks

Gun Moll: Heavy makeup, sexy in a cheap and tawdry way, cynical

Gangster: Dark suit with black shirt & white tie, execute squealers, carry out the orders of Mr. Big

G-Man: Agent of TFG law enforcement, smoke like a chimney, snappy black suit, trenchcoat

Colonial Police Detective: Interrogate suspect, deduce, flash badge, drink gallons of stale coffee, resent G-men trampling your "juris-my-diction"

Lawyer: Make deal, interrogate, know the law, twist the law, find loophole, "Objection!"

Informant: Know dangerous secrets, trade information for money

Fence: Receive hot property, make deals with crooks

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Gadgeteer¹: fix almost anything but it looks weird, invent half-baked contraptions, put together intricate gadgets out of common objects, stammer and sweat around women

Rocket Pilot: Count backwards, look good in uniform, make command decisions, snappy commands, seek out new worlds, carry out mission

Ship's Engineer: Fix engines, complain about engines, hide still, know every nut and bolt in ship

Absent-minded professor¹: forget head if it wasn't attached, invent miraculous but troublesome device or substance, leave isolation chamber doors ajar, accidentally shrink the kids

Ghost Chaser: Know all about ghosts, set up cameras to catch ghosts on film, disprove fake ghosts, get rid of real ghosts

Occult Scholar: Know weird phenomena, remember strange names, find ancient incantation

Bookshop owner: Obtain obscure titles, dust shelves, know where any book in the shop is, know what's in all the books

Antiquarian: Quote from obscure authors, know obscure facts, cite reference

Librarian: Sort books, find newspaper articles, shh!, find obscure information, repair books

Anthropologist: Know aboriginal folktales, know tribal customs, eat disgusting things, speak obscure languages

Masked Crusaders¹: Solving unusual crimes or unraveling bizarre mysteries, Masked Crusaders are the predecessors of the superhero. Though usually possessed of great strength and cunning, they may also have a strange, signature power (like the ability to cloud men's minds or immunity to pain) or a special gadget (anaesthetic dart gun, smoke grenades).

Masked Adventurer: wear strange costume, foil dastardly crime, track criminal to lair, duke it out, escape from certain death, protect secret identity, drive flashy vehicle, send clueless assistants on senseless tasks, rescue clueless assistants

Clueless Assistant: Perform senseless tasks for masked adventurer, wonder about senseless tasks, blunder into traps

Ronin: Struggle with conscious, quote the Buddha, kick ass single handedly and armed with antiques, hunt and be hunted by servants of Oriental Masterminds

And of course, the ever popular “ ‘blank’ Sidekick.”

Smile, smile, and be a villain...

¹ Optionally Double-Pump.

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Bloodthirsty Fiend: wield axe/knife/noose, surprise victim, hide from pursuers, insanely strong, break into locked rooms

Sinister Warlord: conquer the solar system, devise fiendish tortures, utilize exotic devices, create elaborate plots, explain plan to enemy before you kill him, hire henchman without explaining what happened to the dozens of other henchmen you hired, secret escape route, destroy secret base

Oriental Mystic¹: Hypnotize do-gooders, be inscrutable, create illusion, quote Confucius and Lao Tsu, order around local Yakuza or Triad gangs

Snivelling Toady: Cringe and kowtow before the Master, fulfill his bidding to the letter, apprehend hero's girlfriend, menace droolingly, inadvertently give away the Master's plans, bungle job

Thug, Zombie, Mook, Villainous Red Shirt, Frankenstein's Monster, Experiment Gone Horribly Wrong, Rogue Cyborg, Death Dealing Robot Assassin, Ganger, etc.

¹ Once again, possibly a Double-Pump.