

B L U E S H I F T

by Jeri Roys

Humanity was obviously not meant to explore the stars. Short lives versus centuries of travel, hard vacuum versus soft tissue, indefinite isolation versus creeping madness. And what is there to explore? Ice, gas and barren rocks irradiated by alien suns.

And so, naturally, a ship of humans departs the solar system.



HOW TO PLAY

Prologue

Put the ship and role sheets on the table and let players choose one role each. One person will take the lead of the story, as the Game Master (GM). As everyone answers the sheet questions, take notes, and ask follow up questions until a picture of the ship and its relationships starts to form. Before the game properly begins, offer a brief summary of the status of the mission so far.

The first player turns

The turn order is Engineer, Scientist, Bio-technician, Security, Prisoner (skipping any missing roles). Every player has a list of possible first scene prompts on their sheet, it falls to them to choose one, and to the GM to then set the scene. That is to say, describe the location and people present, ideally several player characters. Players always play their own characters, but other NPCs present can be offered to players not in the scene. Any player character present in a scene is allowed to use their once per game abilities, declared abilities become immediate canon facts of the game world.

A scene should be mostly dialog, but if a player declares a risky course of action the GM may call for a dice roll. As a rule of thumb, this would be the sort of thing that would be termed an action scene in a movie, or at least a scene with tense background music. If the player confirms that is what they want to attempt, 2d6 are rolled on the following table:

10 or more: The attempt has gone as well as it could have.

7-9: The attempt at least partially succeeded - but a new complication, hard choice, or piece of unwelcome news presents itself.

6 or less: The attempt has failed, and following the GM's narration of the consequences and aftermath, the scene is automatically over. This can be negated if the player elects to cross out a peril, in which case treat the roll as a 10 or more.

Assuming no rolls are failed, it's up to the GM to decide when a scene is over. Good cues might be a player character or NPC leaving, a key piece of plot established, or simply no one having much more to say.

The GM's turn

After all the players have had a scene, it's the GM's turn. A GM's scene should represent an advancement of the plot from forces other than the players. It's possible to set this like a normal scene if it involves one or more player characters being present (for example, the captain calls a staff meeting about a new problem), but it could also be a narration scene.

Narration scenes should be short with minimal dialog, and are aimed primarily at the players rather than the characters. Think short movie shots, panning around the outside of the ship to see something unexpected, a corpse or soon to be corpse in mysterious circumstances, a sombre order being given, machinery being sabotaged.

Later player turns

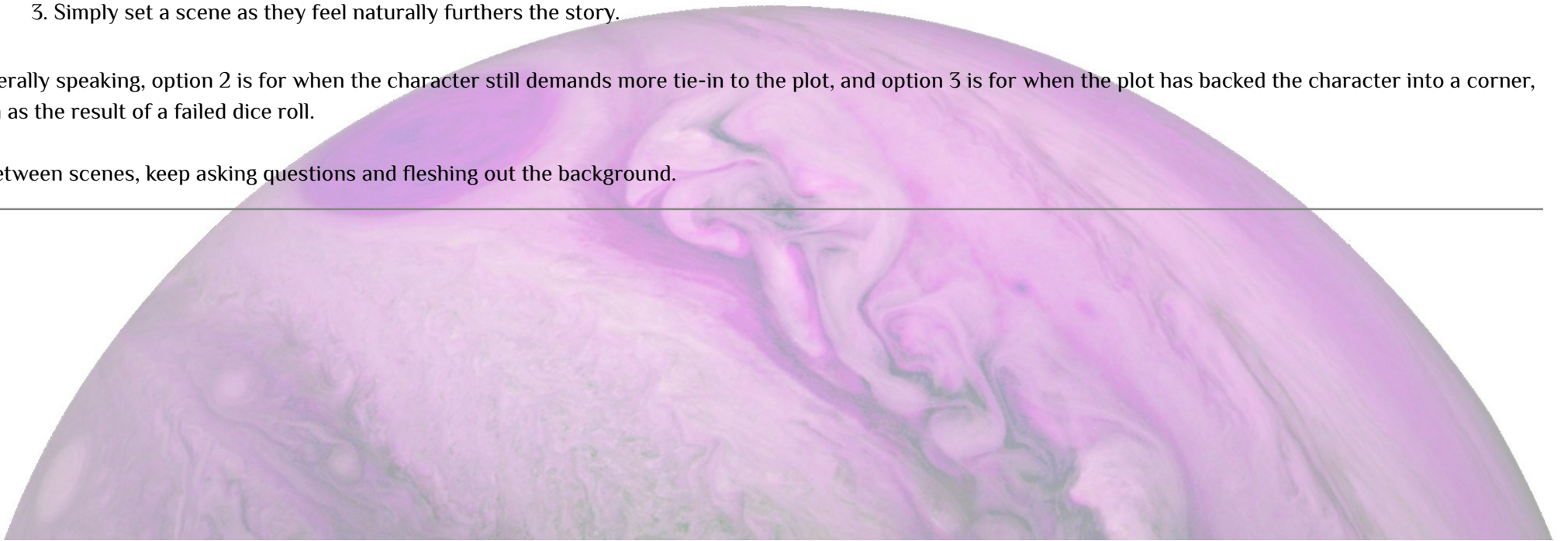
After the first round, the player order (starting with the engineer and ending with the GM) remains the same. Keep in mind however that the scenes can be set whenever is best suited. A scene set years after the last one are possible, even flashbacks can be executed with sufficient care.

Regardless, after the first turns the GM has three options for later player turns:

1. Ask questions about the character's plans and create a scene based on answers.
2. Let them pick from the scene list again.
3. Simply set a scene as they feel naturally furthers the story.

Generally speaking, option 2 is for when the character still demands more tie-in to the plot, and option 3 is for when the plot has backed the character into a corner, such as the result of a failed dice roll.

In between scenes, keep asking questions and fleshing out the background.



Dead characters

With the exception of actions taken with explicit warning from the GM of certain death, no character should be narrated as dead unless they have taken the final peril. If a player does take the final peril, that does not automatically mean instant death (though it can be), but rather an invitation for a dramatic death at the next opportunity, including in a narration scene.

Dead players no longer have a turn, but should be offered first pick of NPCs to play in other scenes.



THE SHIP

What is the ship called?

How will it travel?

Pick one.

- Hugging the speed of light, cutting journeys to mere years subjective time.
- Slow decades or centuries, with the crew in cryo-sleep.

How did it leave?

Pick one.

- In secrecy and radio silence
- Watched and cheered by billions
- Listening to the transmissions of a dying Earth
- Amid obscurity and scorn from a world turned inwards

What is it equipped with?

Pick one.

- A variety of probes, sensors and laboratories.
- Many additional people and practical equipment
- Restricted sections with unknown purpose
- A spinning ring with a self sufficient ecosystem

Who is aboard?

Each player chooses one, takes a sheet and answers those questions. If a question asks who, answer with a player character.

- An Engineer
 - A Scientist
 - A Prisoner
 - A Security specialist
 - A Bio-technician
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ENGINEER

Perfect reliability, unprecedented redundancy, and stress testing beyond all specifications. When it comes down to it, human oversight of the systems is hardly more than a measure for peace of mind.

Name: _____

What is your conflict with the captain?

Pick one.

- They will not allow you root access to the computer systems and won't explain why, making parts of your job unreasonably difficult or impossible
- They brought an outside technical consultant onboard the ship, undermining your position
- They are putting the systems you oversee under extreme unwarranted stress, and it's pushing the ship to its breaking point

Who is constantly requesting your help with technical issues?

Who has incriminating access logs in the infobank?

Who do you most often spend your free time around?

Scenes

Tick off if used to set a scene.

- You are being blamed for a loss of data.
- You are asked to override safety guidelines.
- Someone else's incaution or incompetence has caused an emergency
- You must explain to someone with authority or leverage why what they want simply isn't possible.

Once per game abilities

Tick off at your discretion during gameplay.

- Automatically succeed a repair based dice roll
- Declare easy access between two areas of the ship

Perils

Tick off if directed.

- Your luck is running out
- Your caution is running out
- Your determination is running out
- Your time left alive is running out

SECURITY

Why have a soldier when you can have a machine? Sometimes people appreciate the personal touch.

Name: -----

What is your conflict with the captain?

Pick one.

- They rebuffed your romantic interest
- They show disregard for standard military procedure
- Until a last minute order from on high you were slated for captaincy...

Who is obviously former military?

Who on the crew do you suspect is a plant from another organization? (What is the organization?)

Who is utterly unintimidated by you?

Scenes

Tick off if used to set a scene.

- You detain someone for an interrogation
- You investigate the source of an internal alert
- You are asked to make an omission
- The armory is accessed.

Once per game abilities

Tick off at your discretion during gameplay.

- Automatically succeed a weapon based dice roll
- Declare yourself armed

Perils

Tick off if directed.

- Your luck is running out
- Your caution is running out
- Your determination is running out
- Your time left alive is running out

SCIENTIST

There are more stars in the sky to count than grains of sand on a beach, so it should be no surprise that the latter is considered more practical from a grant writing perspective.

Name: _____

What is your conflict with the captain?

Pick one.

- The captain has told you point blank that your research is not a priority.
- The captain has ordered you not to release certain data.
- The captain caught you using ship resources without authorization.

Who talked you into coming on the the mission?

Who seems uncommonly interested in your research?

With whom do you constantly debate religion?

Scenes

Tick off if used to set a scene.

- Someone wants to shut down your research.
- You make the case for time/resources for a closer investigation
- You reveal troubling data
- Someone uncovers your deliberately concealed data or project

Once per game abilities

Tick off at your discretion during gameplay.

- Declare a theoretical solution a seemingly insoluble threat
- Declare a breakthrough on something you have been studying

Perils

Tick off if directed.

- Your luck is running out
- Your caution is running out
- Your determination is running out
- Your time left alive is running out

PRISONER

There will always be dissent, as long as tyranny persists and the just draw breath. Or until someone works out which electrical impulse it is.

Name: -----

Why are you imprisoned?

Pick one.

- You were discovered aboard after the ship departed
- You violated a direct order
- You were brought aboard against your will

Who is your most frequent visitor?

Who do you know, who has never visited?

Who wants you to trust them?

Scenes

Tick off if used to set a scene.

- You are offered a bargain that seems too good
- A trial is staged
- A new member of the crew is imprisoned
- Someone is desperate for information they think you have

Once per game abilities

Tick off at your discretion during gameplay.

- Declare that there is a reason for a particular person to want you alive
- Know in character if another character just told the truth

Perils

Tick off if directed.

- Your luck is running out
- Your caution is running out
- Your determination is running out
- Your time left alive is running out

BIO-TECHNICIAN

That is a common misconception, in fact for many years now it has been agreed there is little point in anaesthesia when they won't remember the procedure anyway.

Name: _____

Why are you in conflict with the captain?

Pick one.

- The captain vetoed your spouse's application to join the mission.
- They are ignoring your warnings about potentially unstable crew members
- The captain's previous service included what is in your view war crimes

Who are you currently seeing in weekly sessions for psychological issues?

Who has undocumented cybernetics or genetic tampering?

Who has a loved one under permanent medical supervision?

Scenes

Tick off if used to set a scene.

- You are asked to perform a mind-trawl
- An autopsy is requested
- Someone wants your expertise, off the record
- You investigate contradictory or missing medical/psych records

Once per game abilities

Tick off at your discretion during gameplay.

- Automatically succeed a medically based dice roll
- Successfully predict in character what someone on the crew would try to do (this can add you to a scene, and may be triggered when not in a scene)

Perils

Tick off if directed.

- Your luck is running out
- Your caution is running out
- Your determination is running out
- Your time left alive is running out

CREDITS

Game Credits

Design

Jeri Roys

Editing/Layout

Teslin Roys

Key Playtesting and Feedback

Teslin Roys, Michaela Müller, Max Bull, Liana Ampelos

Materials

Blue flame fractal image. Public domain, courtesy of Sharon Apted.

Astral and planetary photography/diagrams. Courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech/SwRI/MSSS/Kalleheikki Kannisto.
