

Prime Time Sci Fi

Inspired by Matt Wilson's Prime Time Adventures

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Prime Time Sci Fi is a game where you tell the television tales of handful of protagonists who struggle with the weirdness of the science fiction world that is thrust upon them, as well as relationships, self identity, and danger. You will create your own science fiction or fantasy series with one player who helps fill in the details and makes trouble for the team of protagonists. But the first and most important thing to remember is that you are working together to make a great television story for you all to enjoy - listen to each other, and work with each other.

One of you will be the Producer, so you should pick that player at the beginning. The producer will play the antagonists and extras of the episodes. The rest of the players will be taking on the role of its stars, the Protagonists. It will be the producer's job to challenge the protagonists, to threaten them so that they have something to triumph over during the course of the episode. It is possible, over the course of the series, for a player to switch from playing the producer to being a protagonist and back, but in each episode there is only one producer.

For your first session you should decide on your series and create your protagonists.

Deciding on Your Series

When you play Prime Time Sci Fi, you'll be building a series of television episodes, each self-contained, but building on the earlier ones. So the first thing all the players (protagonists and producer) must do is to decide what the series will be about.

- What are the weird things that make your series?
- Where and when does your series occur?
- What sort of people are the protagonists and how do they become a team?
- What type of events will make up a typical episode?
- What reoccurring antagonists or dangers do the protagonists face?
- What reoccurring motifs or themes does your series present?

As part of this discussion all the players should agree on some ground rules for things in the series. Things like sex and violence are usually the first concerns, but other topics like politics, religion, and treatment of children and disease can be other areas where people have problems as well. For these ground rules it is best to be specific. Saying PG-13 on sex and violence is hazy, while saying that blood and guts happen off screen and any sex fades to black is more useful.

It is perfectly fine to bring up problems later on, we don't always realize what will give us trouble until it happens. Also don't forget that these ground rules need not solely be for things you don't like generally, they can also be used to help enforce the overall tone of the show. After all, if the series is inspired by 60's teenage sci fi, it is entirely in keeping with the genre that violence and sex be seriously underplayed.

Once you have the series defined and the ground rules laid out, it is time to name your series. This is the first thing the protagonist will write on their sheets. Meanwhile the producer should be noting down the what was discussed as food for ideas for episodes.

Casting a Protagonist

Each protagonist player will be making one of the lead characters of the series. While much of this process appears individual, it is important that you don't create your protagonist in a vacuum. You want to ensure that your protagonist fits with the other protagonists, and that often means both giving and receiving ideas for who your protagonist will be.

Another word of caution, before filling in your protagonist sheet, your *Aspects*: Concept, Edges, Connections, and Resources can all change during an episode, so you will probably want to fill them in using something erasable.

The steps to creating your protagonist are:

1. Develop your protagonist Concept - this is a short phrase describing your protagonist's identity.
2. Choose three Aspects between Edges and Connection with at least one Edge and at least one Connection - Edges describe your personal capabilities or equipment, Connections describe the people important to you, and both are described with short phrases, like the concept. It can be tempting to make Edges like the Concept, but Edges should be more specific. You have many Edges, but only one Concept.
3. Assign Self, Violence, Relationship, and Weird in any order you like among the stress categories - the vulnerable category will be the one where you risk the most, the strong category is where you are protected from permanent harm. Self is associated with Concept, Violence with Edges, Relationship with Connections, and Weird with the team's Resources.
4. Choose your Protagonist Name and write down your Player Name, and record 1 Fan Mail.
5. When all protagonists are ready as a group decide on the team's Resources - these are like Edges or Connections, but belong to all protagonists. You start with one fewer than the number of protagonists.

Don't worry about the Screen Presence circle right now, you'll decide that each episode - usually a 1 or a 2, sometimes a 3. Likewise the boxes and diamonds on the sheet will be used during the game.

After the protagonists are completed, the producer can record the pertinent information on her sheet for each protagonist, leaving the circles open for the screen presence of each protagonist chosen at the beginning of each session, and the kicker box empty for recording the kicker the producer will get at the same time.

Opening an Episode

Before starting with an episode, the producer should pitch the seed of the episode idea, discussing generally the theme and troubles of the episode. Remember, as the producer you are working with other players to make the series fun, you may be challenging the protagonist characters, but you are all in this together. So don't play to close to the chest with secrets and such. Give the players a brief idea for at least how you envision the first part of the episode, and if any protagonist will be especially central.

The protagonists need this understanding to choose their screen presence for the episode. A screen presence of 1 means a supporting character, little will change for these protagonists, but they will get the least screen time. A screen presence of 2 means a more significant role, and a greater risk of change. A screen presence of 3 means that your protagonist is the central protagonist for this episode, and that the producer will be especially targeting you during the episode.

Usually there is an even mix of screen presence 1 and 2, an at most one screen presence 3, if there is any protagonist with screen presence 3 at all. Only in the most unusual situations should there be more than one protagonist with screen presence 3 or none with screen presence above 1.

Once the screen presence is set, the producer decides whether you all have time for a short, normal, or long episode. Each episode of Prime Time Sci Fi is broken up into a series of increasingly shorter acts which raise the stakes gained by winning a conflict. The transition from one act to the next happens as stakes are spent, which can be recorded on the Spent Stakes Sheet. For a short episode each act takes twice as many spent stakes as protagonists, for a normal episode each act takes three times as many spent stakes as protagonists, and for a long episode each act takes four times as many spent stakes as protagonists. Overflowing spent stakes are applied to the next act.

The Spent Stakes Sheet also has a place to record the number conflicts so far this act, which are added to the act's base stakes and any wagered stakes to determine the Initial Stakes of a conflict. The final stakes are the initial stakes plus the total number of 6's rolled.

Lastly, the producer's starting kicker is equal to the sum of the protagonists' screen presences. One point of this can be spent to add a die to the base 1 die the producer always gets or to bring back a named character.

So to recap:

1. The producer pitches the episode.
2. The protagonists choose their screen presence 1 or 2, 3 if this is a signature episode for you.
3. The producer sets the pacing for spent stakes per act and takes her kicker equal to the total protagonist screen presence.

Playing an Episode

An episode of Prime Time Sci Fi is a series of scenes, often cutting back and forth between them as directed by the producer. During these scenes the action reaches a series of crescendos at the end of various acts, during and after the fifth act, the events of the episode are concluded. This does not mean that the protagonists or their situation is unchanged.

Setting the Scene

An important part of being producer in Prime Time Sci Fi is setting the scenes of the episode. Often the producer will simply describe where the protagonists are and what characters, dangers, or weirdness may be around them. But just like in television, don't waste too much time in establishing shots, you want to push the scene into action whether physical or emotional, as soon as possible. If you're not sure where to put a protagonist then ask for ideas, never be afraid to get suggestions or even wholesale scenes from the other players.

Scenes can contain protagonists doing things, talking to each other or to the producer's characters, or other supporting action, but ultimately what makes a scene important is that conflict will arise. Part of the producer's job with the scene is the push that conflict. If you can't see a conflict forming, ask the other players if they see one. If they can't, then you want to end that scene as quickly as possible, and move those protagonists to a place and time that will produce conflict.

Conflict

A conflict happens when two or more sides in a scene want something different out of the events unfolding. The very first thing to do is decide what those outcomes will be. The producer and each protagonist in the scene can choose to stay out of the conflict, describe a specific outcome of events, or join with another player's outcome. It is possible for the producer to stay out of a conflict or even join up with a protagonist.

While differing outcomes can't be the same, as otherwise there is no conflict, there is no need for them to completely contradict. Two protagonists, for example, might both want to capture an alien but differ as to whether the alien is captured alive - or about who gets the credit for the capture. There is an incredible amount of flexibility in setting your outcomes, explore it.

Once the outcomes and participants are determined, the producer declares what two stress categories this conflict best fits. This could be because of a direct match, such as Violence for a combat or Weird for disarming super-tech, or it could be because of a participant's aspects. Disarming super-tech fits the participant's Edges so, the producer declares the conflict to be Weird and Violence.

Now the producer (if she's participating) and the participating protagonists can start building their pools of six-sided dice for the conflict and wagering any held stakes. Non-participants may give ideas and may Complicate the conflict, adding to all of the outcomes. The participants will roll the dice, determine the winner and hence the outcome of the conflict. The winner will then spend the stakes as part of the consequences of her outcome.

- Players choose to participate or not, and choose outcomes. Some players may join forces on the same outcome, but they use separate dice pools.
- Protagonist Dice Pool = Screen Presence + Aspects Spent (check a box) + 2 * Fan Mail Spent
- Producer Dice Pool = 1 + Kicker Spent + 2 * Stress Spent from Participants in Appropriate Categories
- Participants may wager any amount of Held Stakes, adding them to the Initial Stakes.
- Non-participants may offer a Complication, an outcome addition that doesn't conflict with any stated outcome, by offering an amount of Held Stakes. If accepted by all participants:
 - The offered stakes are added as wagered stakes.
 - The complication must be described by the winner as part of the outcome.
- Roll Dice - 6, 5, 4 = successes, player with the most successes wins

- Tie Break: Most 6's, then Most 5's, then Most 4's, then Most 3's, then Most 2's, then Most 1's, then roll off.
- Stakes = Act's Base Stakes + Previous Conflicts this Act + Wagered Stakes + Total 6's Rolled
- The Winner leads the group in describing how her outcome happens, with concrete consequences based on spending the stakes.
- The Winner may give some of her stakes to any player who joined on her outcome.
- Protagonists Can Spend Stakes To:
 - Change (6 Stakes) - Rewrite one Aspect in either of the conflict's stress categories.
 - Grow (3 Stakes for each Aspect of this type, including the one you are buying) - Add a new Aspect in one of the conflict's stress categories (no more than 3 Edges or Connections, no more Resources than Protagonists).
 - Hold (X Stakes) - These stakes become held stakes, they are not spent. You may later use them to give fan mail, wager on a conflict you participate in, or complicate a conflict you are not participating in.
 - Outclass (3 Stakes) - Describe how you achieve your outcome especially impressively, and refresh an aspect in one of the conflict's stress categories. You may do this at most once per conflict.
 - Resolve (2 Stakes) - Remove a stress from a participant in either of this conflict's stress categories.
 - Threaten (1 Stake or 4 Stakes) - Eliminate a character or a group of similar characters, this costs 4 stakes if the character is named.
- Producers Can Spend Stakes To Hold, Threaten, and:
 - Stress - (variable Stakes) Add stress to a participant's stress categories matching the conflict's stress categories, if it is a weakened category the first time you do this in a conflict it gains an additional stress. If a stress category is filled, you may spend a total amount of stakes up to the filled level of stress, choosing aspects related to the stress categories. Doing so causes consequences to the protagonist:
 - * One stake - spend a use of that aspect.
 - * Two stakes - the aspect becomes lost until the end of the episode. (To indicate this mark the diamond next to that aspect.)
 - * Three stakes - that aspect is erased or rewritten in a twisted way (Concepts can only be twisted).
- If the Producer participates in a conflict and loses, she gains one Kicker.

During or outside of a conflict, there are some other options available to players:

- Once per scene a player can use one held stake to give a protagonist a Fan Mail because of something exceptional or fun that the protagonist or its player has done. Unspent Fan Mail is retained from episode to episode.
- Protagonists can introduce a new Named Character by spending a fan mail and reintroduce a Named Character by spending a related Aspect. Producers can do likewise by spending a stress from a related category and protagonist or spending a kicker, respectively.

Closing an Episode

As the episode moves towards the fifth act, most of the challenges and weirdness the producer had in mind should have already come to head. As this moves towards the culmination of the fifth act the producer and the protagonist should work together to mop up any remaining loose threads, at least any that aren't to be kept for later episodes. After the fifth act ends no new scenes are set, and when no more conflicts are desired, the episode ends with perhaps a little description of closure, contributed by any players who wish.

Afterward, it is time to put forward some ideas for follow-up episodes, especially if any threads were intentionally left open. This is also when the producer wets the other players' appetites for the next episode, by giving some advance snippets of what is to come.

At the end of a series this part of the episode can be a bit different as you say good bye to the protagonists and the world the producer has played. You can foretell their fates or let them walk away into uncertainty. Who knows, perhaps there will be a sequel?

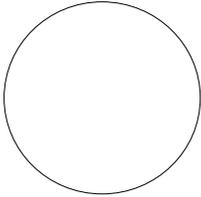
Series Title

Screen Presence

Concept

Lost?

Player Name



Edges

Lost?

Protagonist Name

This Episode

Team Resources Lost?

Stress Categories:

Vulnerable

Normal

Normal

Strong

Connections Lost?

Fan Mail

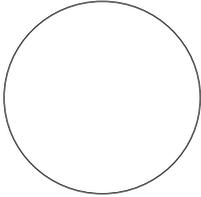
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