

THE CONTACT TEAM

A Character Generation Variant for *STAR TREK: The Role Playing Game*

by J. Andrew Keith

The concept of the "Contact Team" is touched upon in the basic *STAR TREK* rules as an excellent way to allow player characters to function as junior officers on board the *Enterprise*, permitting them to interact with the familiar *STAR TREK* characters but still have their own freedom of action. Short descriptions of some typical landing parties are also included in the rules. Still, the idea of the Contact Team is not explored in depth; this article is an exploration of how the concept might be made a standard part of a *STAR TREK* campaign.

Discussion of the Contact Team was first presented by David Gerrold (best known for his classic "Trouble with Tribbles" episode) in his book *The World of Star Trek*. In his book, an in-depth look at the creation, ideas, strengths, and weaknesses of the series, Gerrold points out the basic silliness of having Captain Kirk, First Officer Spock, and the ship's Medical Officer McCoy beaming down into danger week after week, when their real job should have been staying on the ship and looking after their respective duties as senior officers. Gerrold suggested that the inevitable "Kirk in danger" scenario which resulted from these rather foolish landing parties was dramatically weak (for better drama would have revolved around Kirk's being responsible for making decisions about others, not constantly solving puzzles to get himself out of trouble); it also led to a completely unrealistic feeling that the *Enterprise* crew consisted of the bridge crew, a few security guards and other extras, and 400 passengers who didn't do anything.

Gerrold put his theories into practice in his excellent book, *The Galactic Whirlpool* in which *Enterprise* stumbles across a gigantic generation ship in deep space. Kirk would have liked to lead the exploration party which boarded the strange vessel, but was unable to. Every time he started to get involved, the ship's sensors picked up what was thought to be a Klingon cruiser at the limits of detection range, and Kirk knew better than to absent himself from the center seat when danger threatened. Spock, too, was needed on board. That meant the responsibility for exploring the ship and making contact with its crew fell squarely on the capable shoulders of the Contact Team.

Gerrold's Contact Team is a little bit more than a typical landing party; it is a highly trained team of specialists who are a cut above even the crew of a *Constitution* Class starship. To carry such a team, and their incorporation into a *STAR TREK* campaign would be an excellent way to get players involved in a variety of planetside encounters.

The Contact Team must be considered "expendable", or, in other words, subject to a considerable amount of danger. While a starship captain would be expected to make every reasonable attempt to save such a team, he would be required to sacrifice them if rescue would jeopardize his ship, the rest of the crew, or his mission. Because of this, the Contact Team is frequently thrown on its own resources. Personal risk is high, and there is a considerable turnover in personnel.

Requirements for Contact Team duty are stringent. A character must have STR and END ratings of 55+, and DEX



and INT ratings of 60+. Assignment to Contact Team training can be chosen instead of assignment to a *Constitution* Class starship. Such training takes one year of intensive work and education, and results in quite a bit of character improvement. Endurance and Intelligence are raised by 1D10 immediately. Then the character rolls for success in the training assignment, using the same procedure as for determining Cadet Cruise results (only the LUC modifiers are used).

If the character does not pass, he reverts to the normal character creation process immediately. Should he make the grade, however, he receives a number of special skills as a result of his training. A total of 150 skill points are received and are applied to skills within the character's department specialty. All characters should apply a minimum of 10 points to each skill received by Security Specialists from their 150 point total. Science Department characters can apply points either to Science or Security skills, while Medical Department characters increase Security or Medical skills, and Engineering Department personnel should add to Security or Engineering skills. Emphasis should be placed on such skills as Environmental Suit Operations, Electronics Technology, Personal Weapons Technology, and similar non-shipboard oriented skills.

Characters from other departments should stick to Security skills, although the Gamemaster should allow points to be added to other reasonable skill types such as Negotiation/Diplomacy, Languages, etc. Logic and common sense should apply.

Once they have graduated, Contact Team personnel receive a DM-20 on all assignment rolls. However, if a modified result of less than 0 is obtained, the character is assigned as an Academy Instructor in Contact techniques. Contact Team characters also gain one extra-roll per two years when determining skills received, in addition to all other skill rolls normally received.

The leader of a Contact Team is a Department Head, and thus must go to Command School. If aging is in use, a character may no longer qualify for the Contact Team if aging causes attributes to drop below the minimum established for Contact Team duty.

Who serves in Contact Teams?

A team will be created especially for service on a particular world, depending on the specific needs of the situation. Members of the team are drawn from a qualified pool of professionals from all departments who serve aboard ship. (Each has standard departmental duties, as well as Contact Team service, if needed.) The basic requirements of a landing party would be as discussed in the basic rules, but with a few modifications. The senior Contact Team officer on board

(usually a Lieutenant, though occasionally a Lt. Commander) will serve as Team Leader. One to three Security Specialists generally serve as well. A Communications Department officer (a yeoman) is assigned to record data; he or she will carry a tricorder for this purpose. Science Specialists are present as needed, and a Medical Specialist will be assigned if the situation warrants it (particularly if the planet is known to be hazardous, or if the team is to be on an extended mission). An engineering specialist might be assigned where alien technology is to be analyzed or technical problems are to be expected.

Personnel from the Helm and Navigation departments (Command) are frequently the Team Leaders; most starship commanders are expected to have some degree of exposure to contact techniques. As can be seen, the landing parties thus assembled are fairly large ones. In general, *STAR TREK* episodes such as "Miri", "The Apple", "The Enemy Within", or "Return of the Archons" showed more typical Contact Teams than later episodes like "Bread and Circuses" or "Patterns of Force", where it was Captain and Science Officer all the way.

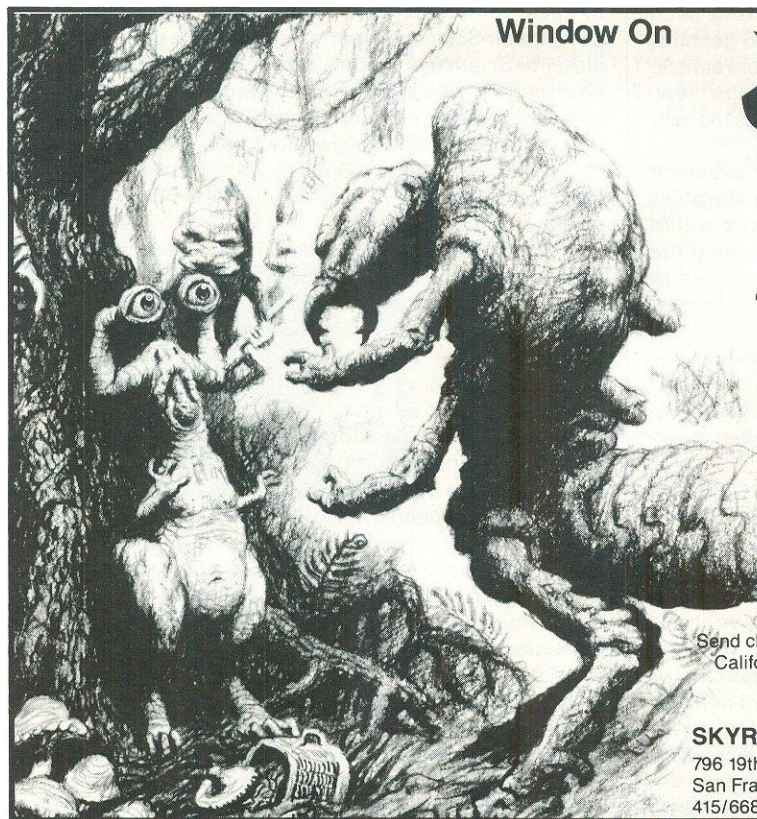
The Contact Team is used strictly in circumstances of exploration or first contact, to discover the unknown dangers of a new world or conduct investigations of unusual phenomena. They may be beamed into the situation, or may man a shuttlecraft, as the situation warrants. Though they maintain communication with the ship when possible, decisions cannot always be made by the Captain; initiative and decisiveness are required by all team members, and the ability to function when cut off from the ship is mandatory.

Senior officers are still expected to serve on landing parties of a diplomatic nature; "A Taste of Armageddon", "Friday's Child", and similar episodes are good examples of this. Also, the Captain may choose to assign a senior officer to a Contact Team if the situation seems to justify it or the experience might be useful for the officer. (Lt. Sulu seems to have received such duty in "The Enemy Within" and "Return of the Archons".) Senior officers and non-Contact Team specialists might also be beamed down to support the original team once they report that all is secure. This permits the Gamemaster to create situations where other personnel can

still be hazarded, even if the Contact Team is in use.

Finally, a strong-willed Captain can choose to pre-empt the duties of the contact Team, as Kirk most certainly tended to do. This might cause a certain amount of censure from Star Fleet Command, but, as long as all worked out right in the end, there would be no problems. A Captain who consistently chooses to hazard himself and his senior officers instead of the qualified (and expendable) contact specialists will, however, face the music the day the ship is faced with danger while her commander is gallivanting about a new world, or casualties among the landing party leave the ship without her senior officers. Either result could be disastrous, and it's a wise captain who knows when to let others take the risks while he makes the decisions. That, after all, is what he's paid for.

And, when it comes to landing party composition, we have the word of an expert, the M-5 Computer, on the role of the Captain and the Chief Medical Officer on a routine landing party: "Non-essential personnel."



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