



## PARROT DROPPINGS

### INDIVIDUATING THE STAR TREK RPG SO

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The Star Trek RPG has a serious problem: there's a parrot on the bridge. That's not surprising, considering the naval background of Star Trek, but why displace a good officer with a parrot? The bird in 'question is the Science Officer. Any time the captain wants to know something scientific, he asks the SO, who asks the GM, who tells the SO, who tells the captain what the captain just heard the GM say. The SO is being deprived of important duties and playability is being reduced by the absence of a vital part of the ship. The computer is missing.

Table 1 is a list of most major activities the computer handles. Very basically, it alerts the SO to various sensory information, combines and analyses data, and acts as a library for research. The SO can act independently on any leads or hunches and choose paths of study. If the television program can be taken as a model, the SO orbits around the computer. With the computer gone, the SO sits around making die rolls and waiting to parrot.

The player needs an aid that will imitate a computer by allowing the SO to choose the data the gamester should supply. In addition, the computer will act on its own like this:

- 1) The computer will always supply the SO with minimum critical data. For example, if sensors detect an object, the computer will supply velocity, bearing, distance, and time to collision (if on collision course).

- 2) The computer will offer a choice of next-level data. Continuing from above, next choices could be mass, esti-

mated origin, estimated destination, propulsion, dimensions, identification. Every level of inquiry will have next-level choices. If dimension and volume were chosen, the next choices could be mass, composition, radiation, energy signature. Some of the potential choices will overlap and duplicate other levels of choice.

- 3) The computer will call attention to significant changes. If an apparent asteroid moves under power or fires a weapon, the computer will give the SO a heads-up message (that's what that thing in Spock's ear is for). The computer is artificially intelligent, so it will be able to do this.

What does this mean in game terms?

- 1) The SO must have a body of data on hand, readily available, but must not be able to see all of it at all times (some data will be obscured while looking at other data).

- 2) Queries must be directed to the GM, who will act as the computer by telling the SO where the answers are.

- 3) The GM must have a location roster for all data in order to answer queries as outlined in 2) above.

These criteria are met very simply by an index card file. Each of the subjects in Table 1 can be labelled with a letter as demonstrated in Table 2. Table 2, all subjects not lettered are subheadings of the previous letter, and would be shown on the same card as the lettered heading above it. For example, the card for "Engine temperature" would also show "Power available."

Inside each subject, each card contains different informa-



tion or clues, and each of the cards are numbered. In Table 3B, various subjects are listed. The cards under a given letter are numbered. Each number has information about the subject. Taking "FILE E" as an example, if the captain wants to know where Nomad is going, play is like this:

Capt: Where was Nomad going when we brought it on board?

SO: Computer, project destination object Nomad prior to encounter.

GM: (looking at roster) G5.

SO: (looking in card file) Earth.

Table 3A shows more sample dialog, Table 3B shows examples of other cards and their next-level choices along the bottom of each one. (Some of them say [ship tel]. This is an abbreviation for letters M-P. The SO can move from any card to any other card just be asking, but getting to cards on the next level list will take less game time than getting to cards not on the list.

The advantages of the alphanumeric index are several. Each letter can be changed to refer to a different subject from time to time just to keep the SO on their toes. Conversely, the index could be left static to simulate increased familiarity with the computer by having a shorter lookup time or allowing cards to be committed to memory. Exchange single numbers — the 5 in "G" trades places with the 5 in "M" — and gives the SO a ringer. Let another player use the file if the SO is bonked on the head, beams down, or is blinded by the cure.

The last advantage of the card file is its use as a tricorder. The tricorder is basically a small, portable sensor set. There are some things it will not tell. When the landing party beams down, use only the cards that refer to tricorder functions (see Table 4) and ignore the other cards in the file.

What is missing from the ST the RPG that is present in the TV show is the computer. The SO interacts with the computer and then provides information for the captain to use. The card file I have outlined above puts the computer back in the game. It will put the SO on the bridge and get the parrot off the GM's shoulder. [Ed. Note: Also checkout the *Star Trek Tricorder/Starship Sensors Interactive Display*, available from FASA Corporation]

Table 1: Categorical listing of computer functions

DETECT OBJECT  
DETECT LIFE  
Quantity  
Type  
DETECT RADIATION  
FIX BEARING  
FIX VELOCITY  
ANALYZE COURSE  
ANALYZE PROPULSION  
DETERMINE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS  
Mass/Density/Specific gravity  
Dimensions  
Composition  
Temperature  
IDENTIFY OBJECT  
RANGE  
SHIP TELEMETRY  
Shield status  
Engine temperature  
Life support conditions  
Damage  
Orbit  
Power available  
Weapon status  
HISTORY  
Planetary

Ship's log  
Log of ships  
Star charts  
COMPUTATION

Table 2: Categories alphabetized for index cards

A: DETECT OBJECT  
B: DETECT LIFE  
Quantity  
Type  
C: DETECT RADIATION  
D: FIX BEARING  
E: FIX VELOCITY  
F: ANALYZE COURSE  
Orbit  
ETA  
G: Guess destination other object  
Guess origin other object  
H: ANALYZE PROPULSION  
I: DETERMINE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS  
Mass/Density/Specific gravity  
Dimensions  
Temperature  
J: COMPOSITION  
K: IDENTIFY OBJECT  
L: RANGE  
M: Shield status  
N: Engine temperature  
Power available  
O: Life support conditions  
Damage  
P: Weapon status  
HISTORY  
Q: Planetary  
R: Ship's log  
S: Log of ships  
T: Star charts  
U: COMPUTATION

Table 3A: Sample dialog

GM: Heads up, A3.  
SO: Sensors detect an object on collision course. Impact in 20 seconds.  
Capt: Evasive maneuvers. Drop to warp 2. Hard to port.  
SO: (to GM) Next-level: Identify object.  
GM: Request is K5. Heads up, F6.  
SO: It is an asteroid but . . . is still on collision course. Impact in 10 seconds. Next-level: Analyze propulsion.  
Capt: Shields up. Arm photon torpedoes. Continue evasive maneuvers.  
GM: Request is H9. Heads up, C7.  
SO: Asteroid is using warp drive. Radio transmissions detected.  
Capt: Open hailing frequencies.  
Ast: . . . have violated the sanctity of the Holy Sphere. Stop or be cleansed.  
Capt: Full stop. Open a channel for reply. This is . . . (drone drone).  
Ast: Do you know the truth?  
GM: Heads up, P3.  
SO: They are preparing to fire on us.  
Capt: Full astern, warp 5.  
GM: P6.  
SO: Weapon fired. Next: Velocity?  
GM: E13, F6  
SO: Coming in at warp 9. Impact in 10 seconds.  
Capt: Can the shields hold?  
SO: Query.  
GM: C2, Heads up, F3 and F1



SO: Unable to say at this time. They are pursuing us.  
 Weapon impact now.  
 GM: Everyone lean to the left. Big hit.  
 Capt: Damage report.  
 SO: Query.  
 GM: 02 and 03, ref B. Heads up, P3.  
 SO: No hull damage, minor electrical damage, decks 5-10.  
 They are firing again. Next: Shield status.  
 GM: Request is M9. Heads up, F7.  
 SO: Shields will not hold. Impact in 20 seconds.  
 Capt: Return fire at will. SO, we need to hids. Find us a planet.  
 SO: Detect object.  
 GM: A10, A11, A15, A17.  
 SO: A planetoid, 10 seconds away, at present velocity.  
 Capt: Is it large enough?  
 SO: A15, Next-level: How big?  
 GM: I13.  
 SO: 50 megatons, 90% Iron. Next-level bearing.  
 GM: D9, Heads up F0.  
 SO: At 183 mark 9. Impact in 12 seconds.  
 Capt: Steer 183 mark 9, go, go.

Table 3B: Sample cards from file

FILE A

#3 object	#15 planetoid
course: collision	course: solar orbit
velocity: sublight	velocity: minimal
distance: 20 s	distance: 10 s
N-L origin, destination, ID	N-L origin, dest., range,
phychars, propulsion	phychars, bearing

FILE C

#2 analysis incomplete	#7 radio transmission
Unable to answer query	detected
N-L Detect object, course,	N-L Detect object, range
propulsion, range, ID	phychars

FILE D

#9 bearing: 183 mark 9	FILE E
N-L velocity, course, ID	#13 velocity: Warp 9
phychars, detect object	N-L bearing, course, ID
	propulsion, radiation

FILE F

#0 object moving/maneuvering	#1 object moving/maneuvering
course: collision	course: collision
distance: 12 s	distance: 0 s
N-L origin, destination, ID	N-L origin, damage, phychars
phychars, propulsion	[ship tel], radiation,
#3 object maneuvering	#6 object moving/maneuvering
course: intercept/pursue	course: collision
distance: 10 s	distance: 10 s
N-L origin, destination, ID	origin, destination, phychars
propulsion, [ship tel]	propulsion

#7 object moving/maneuvering  
 course: collision  
 distance: 20 s

N-L radiation, damage, origin  
 velocity, [ship tel],

FILE I

#13 mass: 50 megatons  
 composition:  
 90% iron 9% nickel  
 1% various  
 N-L detect object, bearing,  
 course, range, [ship tel]

FILE O

#2 no hull damage

#3 minor electrical damage, ref:  
 A: 1-5 B: 5-10 C: 10-15  
 D: 15-20 E: EGR F: BRIDGE  
 G: ASK GM

N-L [ship tel], detect obj

N-L [ship tel], detect obj

FILE P

#3 photon torpedo ergotype  
 detected

#6 energy discharge detected  
 photon torpedo ergotype

N-L course, radiation, range  
 origin, velocity, bearing

N-L course, radiation, range,  
 origin, velocity, bearing

Table 4: Tricorder functions

DETECT OBJECT  
 DETECT LIFE  
 DETECT RADIATION  
 FIX BEARING  
 FIX VELOCITY  
 DETERMINE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS  
 IDENTIFY OBJECT  
 RANGE  
 LIFE SUPPORT

Table 5: sample of GM card roster

FILE F

#obj m/m; collision 10 s  
 #1 obj m/m; collision 00 s  
 #3 obj man; pursue 10 s  
 #6 obj m/m; collision 10 s  
 #7 obj m/m; collision 20 s

FILE P

#3 detect torpedo alien  
 #6 alien torpedo fire

FILE O

#2 no damage  
 #3 minor elect. damage  
 a:1-5 b:5-10 c:10-15  
 d:15-20 e:egr f:bridge  
 g:choice

