
I was a member of the Last Unicorn Games "writing pool" during the last year of the company's existence, when their finances finally faltered entirely. They were eventually purchased by Wizards of the Coast, then later dissolved.

One of the unfortunate consequences of all this is that the work of many writers and developers - myself included - fell through the cracks left by LUG's demise. I've created this corner of my website to present the original drafts - in varying degrees of completion - of all my unpublished LUGtrek work available in electronic form.

- The Deltans - The rough draft of the Deltan writeup from ***Final Frontiers,*** the film-era sourcebook. I was the book's developer. This draft is whimsical in spots, and some of the double-entendres might not have made it past Paramount.
- The Regulans - The rough draft of the Regulans (read: Caitians, but we weren't allowed to say that) from the same book.
- Rigel III - Expanded material on Rigel III written for ***Sky Princes of Orion***, the Rigel System sourcebook.
- Narrating in Klingon - The GMing advice chapter from the much-anticipated Klingon sourcebook.
- To Serve and Protect: The Security Campaign - The GMing advice chapter from the "redshirt book," ***Starfleet Security*** (actually the "yellowjacket" book, since it was for the ***TNG*** era, but Security will always be redshirts to me).
- Mirror Andoria - A brief snippet from ***Through A Glass Darkly***, the Mirror Universe sourcebook (my only contribution to a supplement that would have been thoroughly excellent).
- Distant Ports Call - The GMing advice chapter from the ***Merchants & Traders*** sourcebook for the ***Deep Space Nine*** RPG.
- Exploration for the Narrator - The GMing advice chapter for ***To Boldly Go***, the ***TNG*** sourcebook on the exploration theme.

To my knowledge, none of these items were approved by Paramount; these projects were all frozen before the approvals stage. Edited versions of the exploration and Klingon material *may* have been approved, but the unedited versions are presented here. Some articles have missing sections, missing stats, and missing diagrams due to the incomplete nature of the drafts.

# The Deltans

***Homeworld***

Visitors from earth typically describe planet Delta IV as "Mediterranean." Breezy and warm through much of the year, Delta IV gives the impression of being almost entirely balmy, rocky coastline; that's where all the cities are. Thousands of incredibly tall, and mercifully dormant, volcanoes provide a craggy and dramatic backdrop into which the swollen red sun can set. The air is heady with spices and the sharp musk of the sea. The greatest hazard on Delta IV is untamed nature — powerful monsoons and hurricanes occasionally threaten even modern cities like Antos and Tosém, and the Deltan Ribbon Snake and Yellow Tree-Cat are still responsible for dozens of deaths every year. Deadly and beautiful, Delta IV is among the most unusual planets of the Federation.

***History***

Deltans are one of the very few Federation members with no wars in the whole of their species' history. Prior to becoming a spacefaring race in the early 1800's, the history of the Deltans is a languorous, heady cycle of art, philosophy, romance, and Eros. While other worlds advanced in leaps and strides in the heat of conflict, the Deltans advanced gradually, pleasantly, in the warmth of intimacy.

So unprepared were they for the realities of other cultures, and so oblivious to the dramatic impact their powers of communication might have on sentients unfamiliar with them, the Deltans nearly destroyed themselves — and several other worlds — in the 20$^{th}$ century.

In 1896, the first Deltan warp-vessels encountered the Ghanods, the nearest sentient neighbors to Delta IV. Humanoid, intelligent, and advanced, they seemed like good candidates for friends, and the Ghanods agreed. Trade relations began almost immediately; the two species shared a mutual fascination.

It was a romance not meant to be. The Deltans related to the Ghanods as they did to one another — with sexuality as a central component in adult communications. The Ghanods, unprepared for the intense and transforming experience of sexual "conversation" with the Deltans, fell head-over-heels, as it were, obsessed with the erotic wonder of Deltan social intercourse. They began worshipping the Deltans as gods, causing global schisms in their native, sexually-conservative religions. Centuries of Ghanodi repression popped a collective blood vessel, and an entire world went mad with lust and worship. Temples burned, and bacchanals were organized . . . but the Deltans were unwilling participants.

The Deltans found themselves, in turn, adored, worshipped, and forcibly kidnapped. In a rage, the Ghanods went to war with one another, fighting over the limited supply of Deltan colonists, who were forced to flee into the wilderness, where they were hunted down.

Leaving hundreds behind to live out their days pawed by maddened Ghanods, the Deltans had no choice but to retreat to their homeworld. With no warp-drive capability (the Ghanods had barely achieved space flight), their new worshippers could not follow.

### *Culture*

The Deltans, almost as one mind, wept with horror and grief at the consequences of their contact with others, and foreswore all alien contact. The species suffered a global plague of desperate depression, with several pro-celibacy cults resulting in mass suicides, littering the pale beaches of Delta IV with the dead.

The Federation made first contact with Delta IV in 2262, at a stage when the Deltans had healed the generations-old trauma of Ghanodi contact, and returned to a measure of cautious curiosity regarding other worlds. With much greater care, the Deltans agreed to come forward from their self-imposed exile . . . to shake hands.

### *Physiology and Psychology*

Deltans prize elegant communication above all else. Their ability to combine telepathic, chemical, and physical modes of communication creates an unparalleled canvas for the Deltan imagination. Their long struggle with the dangers of their natural surroundings, in turn, provides the tension lends Deltan art its genuine passion and range. The Deltans didn't avoid war because they're perfect pacifists — they avoided it by living on a world that supplies every material need in abundance while exposing them to constant mortal threat. Demand never exceeded supply, and there was always room, frequently at the expense of entire cities consumed by storms. "The lovely crucible" of Delta IV (as the 22nd century poet, Bondar, wrote) created a people who work hard to survive disaster, seeking beauty, peace, and pleasure any way they can.

While Deltan literature, art, and theater (not to mention daily life) include sexuality as a constant theme, and the Deltans consider sex a normal part of any friendly adult relationship, it would be unfair to refer to them as sexually obsessed, in the way some other species can be. The Deltan emphasis on sexuality is proportionate to its physical necessity. Deltan females cannot conceive from a single intimate joining; they require dozens or even hundreds, with the same partner, over a course of years. The result, when combined with the Deltan potential for natural disaster, is a negligible population growth over the past several millennia. Only in recent centuries has technology permitted any real "explosion" in Deltan numbers.

Fortunately, those Deltans who aren't burned, crushed, drowned or poisoned by the dangers of Delta IV can live for centuries, and Deltan children are almost always born to stable, loving couples with a long history — since short-term "marriages" never produce offspring. This contributes, certainly, to the placid nature of Deltan culture.

The Deltans *communicate* through skin-contact (including sexual intimacy) as easily as they do verbally. Some of the loftier Deltan concepts can apparently only be communicated when the contact is appropriately intense. This communication is both telepathic and chemical, and can include complex (if abstract) concepts and a bewildering range of emotional expressions, the latter mostly via pheromone exchange.

Studies performed by the Deltan Academy of Communication have proven that Deltan methods of Sexual interplay — including both telepathic and chemical components — are to a limited degree *learnable* by sufficiently gifted members of other species. This has led to the Deltan assumption that they are simply more advanced, sexually, than other species, just as Tellarites are more advanced engineers.

Their willingness to make their advances available to the Federation is tempered by an almost phobic caution. The Deltans carefully evaluate and license each species they encounter as either "sufficiently advanced" or not, to join sexually with them. Some species — such as Humans, Centaurans and Vulcans — are regarded as primitive but with potential for safe exchange under controlled circumstances, and humans on Delta IV are sometimes invited to participate in communications experiments for the betterment of Federation unity. Other species (notably the Tellarites, Andorians, and Axanari) are fully licensed for relations with Deltans. Starfleet shares the Deltan concern and caution, and requires Deltan officers to file a species-specific celibacy oath when serving onboard starships.

### *Noted Accomplishments*

Many combined Deltan-Tellarite engineering teams have advanced civil engineering by decades at a stroke — particularly those methods directly applicable to coastal "storm-proofing" of urban development.

### *Noted Characters*

Unuro, powerful telepathic teacher who has taught thousands of non-Deltans advanced techniques of his species' modes of communication. Gaima Ina (2241-2272), a heroic Deltan colonist on Tranganea II, who saved thousands of lives — both Deltan and Klingon — when he sacrificed himself to appease a powerful alien entity later destroyed by the *U.S.S. Eagle.*

# The Regulans

### *Homeworld*

Regula II ("Dralaph" in the native *shanifir* tongue) is a heavily-forested world with several dozen small continents and thousands of large islands. The climate is on the cooler edge of temperate; the equatorial regions straddle the line between subtropical and tropical conditions. Nearly every island on Regula II is inhabited, and the world features many fine cities and excellent starport facilities.

While unquestionably the Regulan homeworld, Dralaph is only one of more than a dozen long-settled Regulan worlds, clustered across seven sectors of Federation space.

### *History*

The felinoid Regulans were a sizeable interstellar culture for more than a century before the Federation made First Contact with them, having discovered warp travel at around the same time as humanity. Fourteen systems inhabited by Regulans were as populous as any of Earth's colonies at the time, and each sported a stable, global government. However, Regulan worlds lacked subspace radio. By necessity, each world was an independent entity, most of which fancied themselves the "new center" of Regulan culture and commerce. When the *U.S.S. Pardalis* first entered Regulan space in 2240, those worlds were locked in a vicious interstellar war.

The bone of contention — at least at first — had been the highly limited supply of Regulan dilithium, but the war had sprouted tangles of racist and religious intolerance in that fertile soil. The Regulans — who pride themselves on their distaste for war — found that their distaste for *each other* was the more powerful force. The Regulans went to war as ashamed as they had been proud, and fought all the more bitterly.

Armed to the teeth and sick with regret, the war had been driven by the petty hatreds of a few key leaders, but developed into an economic fact of life. After a few years, the Regulans had war and starvation as their only pastimes.

The arrival of the Federation proved a godsend. Although the *Pardalis* was crippled and ultimately destroyed by a nuclear warp-missile launched by an overzealous Regulan gunner, a core of survivors returned to the Federation with assurances that the missile had been fired *despite* orders. The initial truce found parties on all sides nervous, but eager to be friends.

A lot has been written in the decades that followed about the "Federation Effect" that brought peace to the Regulans, and resulted in the creation of the Regulan Trade Alliance less than three years after the loss of the *Pardalis.* But most now agree that the Regulans desperately wanted to break the cycle of war — they just lacked the focal event needed to bring them to the table. The Federation provided that, along with FTL radio technology, and enough economic incentives to encourage even the most prideful Regulan to stop shooting for a while to talk. Introduced to their many neighbors via the subspace waves, the Regulans set their talents to the long-term project of building what is now one of the most prosperous alliances within the larger umbrella of the UFP.

### *Culture*

The dangerous racism of their interstellar war is happily abandoned, but the wide variety of coloration, fur type, and body-shape of the Regulan races is still the basis for hundreds of Regulan subcultures. The Regulans are sensualists in every sense, but they put particular store in their eyesight and sense of smell. Each shade of each color carries with it a set of connotations, and an innocently-chosen alien wardrobe might strike a Regulan as comical, absurd, or even mildly offensive, for reasons they're always willing to articulate. Regulans are critical of others, but equally so of themselves, and have surprisingly tolerant, gentle natures, considering their recent history.

Regulans prize physically creative artwork above the ephemeral. A Regulan might enjoy dancing as a kind of *sport,* for instance, but don't really regard it as *art* unless it makes something permanent that can be touched. Each of the Regulan allied worlds prides itself on local variants of the *strovothra*, a form of organic-matter sculpture meant to stimulate

the nose as well as the eye. A 60-meter column of twisted fruit-bearing vines, bonded by damp clay, was erected as a centerpiece display at a Regulan exhibition in Paris, on Earth.

### *Physiology and Psychology*

The Regulans are felinoid bipeds with height and weight comparable to humans (some are slightly heavier). Their fur ranges from the short and glossy to the thick and shaggy, with any number of colors and patterns possible, organized by a bewildering variety of races and subspecies.

Regulans are born as twins or triplets, a fixed number depending on subspecies (the female Regulans are either double- or triple-breasted, accordingly).

Regulans are moved by beauty, horrified by violence and anger, and wrestle constantly with their potential for each. On the whole, they are a peaceful people, who turn nasty only when their feelings are seriously wounded.

Regulans have blunt claws that *can* be sharpened as dangerous brawling weapons, but most Regulans find the practice abhorrent and repulsive. Regulan fur is highly sensitive to both touch and temperature, though the Regulans themselves are adaptable to a wide variety of climates.

### *Noted Accomplishments*

Regulans have achieved minor celebrity in nearly every area of endeavor, from the artistic (shehi pleth's bio-sculptures are gawked-at and sniffed in every part of the quadrant) to the scientific (the Sethessa Project, for example, which advanced the programming of the modern Universal Translator to levels of accuracy undreamed of before Regulan science got hold of it). Their most valuable contributions to Starfleet have been in diplomacy; a well-motivated Regulan is capable of great tact and understanding, and their personal warmth provides a much-needed complement to the cool logic of the Vulcans, especially in the touchy conferences which follow First Contact with new species.

### *Noted Characters*

Pahtrek (2216-2270), linguist and programmer who spearheaded the Sethessa Project. R'moa, the celebrated head chef at the President's Mansion in Paris. Vandor Shen, heroic commander of the *U.S.S. Pardalis-A.*

# Rigel III

**Note:** This material makes reference to the Chelarian material written by James Maliszewski for ***Final Frontiers***. A developed version of James' text was to be reprinted along with this in ***Sky Princes***. The two works are meant to be taken as a single piece, and can be read in either order! Big thanks to James for making his work available online!

Note to developer: The umlauts in some Chelarian words (which I wanted to sound vaguely *damp*) indicate a diphthong. Their specific placement within the diphthong indicates syllabic emphasis. So "Löablanëe" is "LO-ah-blah-NAY-eh." A note to this effect would make a good layout-correcting boxout, if required. Other possible boxouts include stats for swamp-skimmer craft and for dealing with Luglamo-drowning..

"Chelar," the native term for Rigel III, means "deep place" or "the pit." Chelar is 700 million square miles of wetlands, jungle, and smoking volcanoes. She's as ancient and storied as any rock warmed by Rigel, but her secrets are well hidden. To know Chelar is to be drawn down into the hot muck of the pit, to lose yourself in the deep place.

## Environment

Civilized Chelar is a modern network of plastic cities, polyrail trans-tubes, and glassteel structures gleaming in the foggy sunlight. But all this is imposed on a wilderness that still dominates much of the surface — a world heady with the hot reek of the primordial soup, where dinosaurs chew grass on the shores of sulphurous lakes, giant plants can devour an unwary man, and the evolution from beast to free-willed sentient isn't ancient biology, but a childhood memory.

Due to Chelar's thick, cloudy atmosphere (Rigel is often described as *soggy-looking* by astonished offworlders), a powerful greenhouse effect warms every part of the planet's surface, and blurs the climactic zones into very broad and indistinct bands. Chelar ranges from steam-burn tropical at the equator to a warm-temperate at the poles. The coldest spot on the coldest day on Chelar is barely "cool" to a human, and the humid, oxygen-rich air can render newcomers drunk, giddy, and exhausted all at once. Along with the sultry beauty of the greenery and smoking mountains, this creates a profoundly romantic impression on many visitors.

The surface of Chelar is 92% water, but a casual glance from space wouldn't make it apparent. The planet is blanketed by two enormous continents — Löoqua and Lüebra — separated by a thin strip of briny ocean that runs from pole to pole like a belt. These large continents, however, are themselves barely "land." Here on Chelar, the distinction between land and water is as hazy as the evening sky, and the green masses of foliage rest on a blend of marshy soil and open swamp, riddled with rivers, lakes, and tiny seas. To find genuine "dry land" on Chelar, you need to climb a volcano — and many of those are active.

Rigel III is a literal "hotbed" of life; every part of the planet is in a constant cycle of birth, growth, and fragrant decay. The rich, the rotting vegetation perpetually feeds Chelar's spongy soil, and provides the planet with an unmistakably fecund perfume.

## Locations

### *Löablanëe*

Chelar has many hundreds of small cities and thousands of villages, many very isolated. There are only a few large metropoli of any account. Löablanëe, the greatest of these, sits in the exact center of Löoqua, just south of the equator. Its distinctive domes of amber plastic — like all permanent Chelarian structures — are built to resist the corrosion and rot that come quickly, here, to anything made of wood or even brick. Everything in Löablanëe is made of either the amber plastic, or some combination of black volcanic metal and smoky volcanic glass. In the summer, the citizens gather in the walk-tubes and plazas to witness the billions of glittering insects, sparkling in the moonlight, as they try vainly to chew their way in. In the winter, they watch the same insects die, driven by the deadly Öameq clouds erupting from the marshes, dropping into a thick layer of sparkling corpses to enrich the bubbling muck . . . the "Chelarian snowfall," humans call it.

Deep within the city, the contrasts are less grotesque, and more political. Löablanëe is a starport, friendly to all kinds of offworld traffic. Klingons are as common as humans, here, and both groups are alien minorities to the Orion and Chelarian presence. Even the Kaylars are here in greater numbers, though they aren't nearly as visible in starports.

The natives insist on peace in areas of business, and never hesitate to enforce their will accordingly. Spies meet their contacts at Löablanëe without fear of arrest; murderers and despots can rent a room for the price of a cheap meal. Petty hatreds and desperate needs are observed, exploited, and enjoyed by the Chelarian proprietors. Anything from love to vengeance is legal for sale, here, provided the fun parts of either are kept out of the plazas.

### *Rotoächko*

A kingdom of "wild" Kaylar centered near the southern pole of Lüebra, Rotoächko is a tiny pocket of life — but it's the largest non-Chelarian society on Rigel III. The Rotoächko tradition of kidnapping young Rigellian girls to be raised as members of their "celestial court" came to the attention of Starfleet in 2258, when a Lt. V'konn, a Vulcan security officer visiting Chelar with a research team, was mistaken for a Rigellian and taken to the depths of the Toäch harems. She was presumed dead, and it was nearly two years before contrary evidence led to a rescue effort. Far from killed, she had been "promoted" to the status of goddess of a nearby mountain.

### *Lenïa Pools*

There are many thousands of these on Chelar — the sacred ponds and springs consecrated for the care of infant Chelarians (though "care" is an overstatement; Chelarian young are left to fend for themselves prior to their Awakening).

For years, it had been assumed that nearly any small body of water was suitable for the laying of Chelarian egg-clutches, until a diplomatic snafu in 2254, when the well-meaning crew of the *U.S.S. Mercury* rushed a pregnant Chelarian diplomat to the wrong kind of pond. Doctor Sawyer's notes (see p.00) presumably included this detail amid the many lost sections of his documentaries.

### *The Tubes*

Due to the unpredictably stormy nature of Chelarian weather, ground transport via plastic "polyrail tube" is the preferred mode of everyday planetary transport. Threaded like a corkscrew with a series of shifting rails that both power and guide high-speed gyrocars, the tubes also open into a network of long-range ballistic tunnels for rapid cross-continent travel. In the railless ballistic tubes, the gyrocars can safely achieve subterranean orbital speeds while sealed away from the encroaching muck.

## Doctor Sawyer's Chelar

The Federation's introduction to Chelar's secrets was the (fragmented) work of Dr. Lucas Sawyer, who lived in and studied the jungles of Lüebra for 12 years, observing the dinosauroid life-forms there, poking into sunken ruins, and taking part in the cultures of the Abläe Delta region.

Inspired by reports from Andorians who'd met Chelarian traders in the early days of the Andor/Rigel corridor, Sawyer moved to Chelar with his wife and colleague, Cynthia, in 2233. Their first year was a trial that nearly killed them, with swarms of insects, the deadly gas-clouds, and the corrosive "hot quicksand" of equatorial Chelar each threatening them in turn. After Cynthia mastered the local Chelarian dialect, matters improved considerably, and the pair set to work cataloguing lifeforms, legends, traditions, and records of physical anomalies. They were welcomed by the friendly natives into many Chelarian communities, and recorded hundreds of hours of documentary footage. In 2236, while compiling the first batch of research in their home in the small city of Legão, they had a son, Richard.

### *Quests and Tragedies*

Emboldened by his successes, Sawyer took his family back into the deep jungle in 2238. Except for brief visits for mail and supplies, the Sawyers would never again live within the safe confines of civilization.

Carving his own path up into the higher plateaus of the rain forest, Sawyer pursued a legend. Tales of hidden ruins, concealed by vines and mud — and of an ancient temple where the Chelarians once received messages from their gods — drove him onward, and along the way he and Cynthia catalogued hundreds more varieties of insects, dinosauroids, and native flora.

Working meticulously over a period of seven years, the sawyer expedition covered over 4,000 square kilometers of the upper Abläe river valley and adjacent territories, much of it dangerously hostile jungle. The rest was nearly-impassable wetlands, traversed slowly by *Padru* — a native form of surface-skimming boat that can collapse into a package carryable by a single man. Federation science teams have recently recreated parts of Sawyer's travels

with modern transport gear and the latest in tricorder technology, and they've covered the territory no faster than the Sawyers did with the tools of thirty years ago and a child in tow.

They key parts of Sawyer's discoveries remain lost, possibly forever. In early 2245, Sawyer was plucked by a band of Chelarian pilgrims from a plastic raft drifting down the Abläe. Nearly dead from exposure and mad from grief, he was clutching the body of his wife, who had drowned. Sawyer was unable to speak for weeks, until he was handed over to an Earth-colony trading vessel bound for the Alpha Quadrant. Onboard, he babbled about ancient evil surging blackly in the mud, and of a glistening paradise of Chelarian Ebony where the "beautiful ancients" lived. He died in his sleep on Stardate 931.8.

Young Richard, and the greater portion of the Sawyers' recorded findings, were never found. The few record tapes recovered along with the Sawyers themselves were a seemingly-random mix of cultural notes, interviews, nature footage and "home movies" of Richard demonstrating his extraordinary skills at swimming and acrobatics. When published in 2246, Sawyer's findings fascinated Federation biologists and anthropologists, encouraging new interest in the already-topical Rigel system. It created as many questions as answers, though, and gave a dangerously fragmented view of the Chelarians that only several years of contact has begun to complete.

Sawyer's final words before drifting to sleep, as recorded by Quartermaster David Macintyre of the I.T.V. Laughlin, were "Tomorrow, you must take me back to Richard. He is safe where they cannot steal his soul. Take me there tomorrow; promise me."

Recent rumors of a human "god-chief" leading a group of empathic Chelarians on raids of ongoing archaeological efforts have awakened fresh speculation on the final fate of Richard Sawyer, but the truth may never be known.

## History

The history of Rigel III is the story of the Chelarian nations — a peaceful collection of industrious bureaucracies. While the Chelarians have certainly known war on occasion, the pacifistic nature of the species, reinforced and aided by a globally-unified set of religions, has served to keep wars scarce. For a long time, the Chelarians simply went about their slow and deliberate business, and the rest of the galaxy was beyond their interest.

With the multiple expansions of the old Orion empires, matters changed, and the Chelarians sharpened their instincts for self-defense. An army of quietly determined Chelarian warriors proved to be terrifyingly competent in battle, employing a variety of weapons, efficient hand-to-hand (claw-to-beak) styles, and squads of tactically-trained telepaths. Orion rule was a constant on Chelar for centuries at a time, but so was frequent and effective Chelarian rebellion.

In the post-imperial years, the Chelarians have turned their fertile muck into a bounty as rich as any dilithium mine, providing foodstuffs, natural bases for pharmaceuticals, and recreational plant compounds for much of the densely-populated Rigel sector.

Since Chelar's treasures - the rich, alkaloid soil and an array of enigmatic scientific/historical curiosities — are diffuse and require dedicated work to exploit, Chelar is an untempting target for a pirate or despot. Rather than *rob* them, the pirates tend to pay them rent! Well aware of the advantages of their position, the Chelarians welcome outlaws with open arms and beckoning trails into the rain forests, where anyone can be hidden for a price.

## Flora and Fauna

Chelar is a rich, gray-green stew of life and decay, bulging and squirming and wriggling with vigor. Puncture an Aëva-tree's sac, and you'll unleash a thousand white worms. Ekëula lizards and ormo birds will devour the worms. The ormo birds become trapped in the sticky maw/fronds of one of Chelar's hundred species of carnivorous flowers, and so on . . .

From the depths of the rivers to the thick layers of clouds brushing damply against the treetops, every corner of Chelar is in motion (with no shortage of noise and smells, either).

***Öagu (Chelarosaur)***

[Stat Block]

Form: Large, swift, semi-bipedal dinosauroid predator with black teeth and a heavy tail for balance.

The Öagu, native to the equatorial rain forests of Lüebra, is nicknamed the "Chelarosaur" by Federation exobiologists — it's the most well-known of the many dozens of surviving dinosauroids on Chelar.

The Öagu's powerful, orange-and-grey body is reminiscent of the extinct Terran Allosaurus, and the visual analogy holds true: the Öagu is 4 metric tons of danger, a fierce predator that devours large animals to sate its appetite. The animal-rich Lüebran jungles offer no shortage of food, but Öagu seem to enjoy variety, anyway, since at least nine Federation citizens have been maimed or devoured by the beasts in the past five years. Six of these have been Tellarite, an alarming proportion that's generated a chill and disquiet in the entire species, forced to consider that there are deadly animals in the galaxy who fancy their flavor. One popular holoplay, a lurid horror story, has already appeared to capitalize on the morbid statistic.

Both Rotoächko Kaylar and some secretive "primitive" bands of jungle Chelarians use the Öuni, a smaller, more quadrupedally-inclined cousin of the Öagu, as trained ceremonial mounts. This recalls the days of the Orion empires, when trained Ouni were used as war-mounts and living weapons against the Orion overlords.

***Megu ("Chelarian Venus")***

[Stat Block]

Sometimes, when a vine appears to twitch or slither, it's a trick of the light. Sometimes, it's a deadly serpent. Sometimes, though, worst of all, it's really a vine.

The Megu — Chelar's largest and hungriest carnivorous plant — is common on both continents, anywhere that's *wet* in the broad tropical band that straddles Rigel III like an oily green cummerbund. The largest known Megu (the "Öemu Family," a tourist trap — seldom literally — just outside of Löablanëe) weigh in at over three metric tons per feeding-cluster. A cluster is an acres-wide mass of pulpy root-bulbs, tentacular vines, and sickly-sweet flowers concealing gigantic "Venus flytrap" style maws. Such a plant requires a man-sized victim every two or three days to thrive and expand. Most, of course, feed on several smaller creatures, instead.

Fighting a "Chelarian Venus" can be like fighting the jungle itself, with vines appearing from all directions. The sensitive blooms that activate the feeding response are often many meters within the boundaries of the plant's feeding zone, leaving few escape routes for travelers who haven't learned the distinctive sight and scent of the flowers, or how to distinguish either from the visual and olfactory "noise" of the jungle.

Many megu grow near pools of Luglamo (Chelarian "hot quicksand") magnifying the threat. If a Megu doesn't feed on animal flesh, it can survive for several years (shrinking its feeding area slowly) on rich soil and weak photosynthesis.

**Planet Name:** Chelar (Rigel III)

**Class:** M

**System Data:** Chelar has two very small moons, Uäno and Uvor

**Gravity:** 1.1 G

**Year and Day:** [Ken: It wasn't made clear in the outline what distance this and other worlds are from Rigel itself, so I can't calculate the year]

**Atmosphere:** Oxygen-rich atmosphere, higher than average pressure and typically humid, with a powerful greenhouse effect. Oxygen levels aren't high enough to require protective gear, but are sufficient to noticeably affect human emotions and fatigue levels.

**Hydrosphere:** 91.8% surface water, very diffuse. One oceanic band, with the rest being spread among Chelar's many wetlands, rivers, lakes, and small inland seas.

**Climate:** Warm to hot, extremely humid. Minimal variation in climate zones, minor but noticeable seasonal variation.

**Intelligent Life:** Chelarians (6.3 billion), with numerous others representing less than 5% of the total (highest non-Chelarian concentrations are Orion and Kaylar).

**Tech Level:** Tech level five overall, but with many pockets of more primitive levels. The starports are closer to tech level six.

**Government:** Several nations, mostly heavily-bureaucratic republics with a few oligarchies.

**Culture:** Spiritual, agrarian culture with considerable value placed on intelligence and tenacity.

**Affiliation:** Independent, with ties to stronger powers in the Rigel system and in open negotiations with the United Federation of Planets.

**Resources:** Rich botanical resources of every kind.

**Places of Note:** Löablanëe, the major starport. Rotoächko, a "wild Kaylar" kingdom.

**Ship Facilities:** Relatively primitive service available in the minor starports. No shipyards.

# Narrating in Klingon

Klingons and the Klingon Empire can be involved in your *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* series in several ways, from their traditional role as uneasy allies or open adversaries to the unique challenge and excitement of a *Klingons-Only* campaign, where the pursuit of glory and honor for the Empire, not the goals of the United Federation of Planets, shape the stories that are told. With the information provided in this boxed set, the Narrator can also build a series around non-Klingon infiltration into the empire (perhaps to control the potential ravages of the Klingon/Cardassian war) or even Klingon infiltration into the Federation, from the perspective of Klingon Intelligence agents. The possibilities are many.

Regardless of whether you make the Klingons the focus of the series, or simply of an interesting arc or subplot, this chapter may be of value to you. In addition to its role as a Narrator's tool, this chapter will also be useful to players; the themes discussed here are meant to inspire character ideas as well as stories!

To these ends, we examine what makes an episode of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* RPG "feel Klingon." Klingons have an aesthetic, outlook, and a strongly-held code of ethics that is markedly different from that of the UFP or Starfleet, and episodes or series featuring them are richer and more engaging if those differences are highlighted and explored. The exploring we leave to you; the highlighting starts here.

## Klingon Axioms

In the *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* rulebook, we described four *axioms,* fundamental ideas that sit at the core of *Star Trek,* that must be present for your series to reflect the ethos of the TV show. Things change, however, when examined from the Klingon viewpoint! While each of the Next Generation axioms apply to Klingon stories to some degree (especially "Cinematic Action!"), there are two fundamental *Klingon* axioms that should sing through the blood of any episode or series in which the sons and daughters of Quo'noS take part:

***Honor is Everything!***

And honorable behavior in the game should be *rewarded*. By the same token, dishonorable behavior should *never go unpunished.* While Klingons, like humans and others, may certainly find redemption for their dishonors, a tale can not be truly Klingon if dishonor has no price.

What is "honorable" behavior, then, in terms that apply to writing and narrating good Klingon episodes? Honor doesn't exist in a vacuum; there must be something to *be* honored. The most vital forms of honor among the Klingons can be lumped into four broad categories, each of which overlaps. A particularly rich and exciting Klingon series is one that reflects the value of each of them from time to time.

- ***Personal Honor:*** Klingons have no patience for liars, cowards and weaklings. They have a strong sense of virtuous responsibility, and personal honor is about standing up and accepting the negative consequences of personal action (if the consequences are deserved), demanding the recognition for personal triumph when it is due, and defending choices that the Klingon knows to have been the right ones, even in the face of adverse opinion or mortal danger.
- ***Ties of Blood:*** Honor does not stop at a Klingon's skin; it extends to his brethren, his trusted companions, and most especially to his name and his blood. A dishonored Klingon dishonors every Klingon that will be descended from him, for many generations to come. And any threat to the honor of a Klingon who's name you bear — even if that Klingon is long free from the confines of mortal life — is a serious attack on your *personal* honor. Familial honor *is* personal honor, extended to an entire bloodline.
- ***Duty to Superiors:*** It is honorable — in fact, commendable — for a Klingon to advance in rank by killing a weak or ineffectual superior. Such an act strengthens the chain of command by culling out the weak links in the chain. But a worthy superior is to be respected and obeyed, and this form of honor extends from a warrior's immediate commander all the way up the ladder to the leadership of the Klingon Empire. Honoring the Empire and the will of those who rule it is vital to the survival of the species, the glory of all worthy warriors, and the personal honor of any who benefit from the Imperial might and prestige.
- ***Ancient Tradition:*** Honor of self, family and Empire are in many ways facets of a much larger concept, that of honoring the many traditions that have built the Empire and made it thrive. This is why honor is such a vital axiom in Klingon stories: Klingons are as they are for reasons — ancient reasons, tested by time and blood and fire and proven in expansion and prosperity. Klingon stories should recognize this and sing with the truth of it. Klingons aren't just "hung up" on honor, honor is an essential part of being Klingon, and something to be *celebrated*.

When devising episodes, it's often handy to remember that honor is often best defined in negative terms. That is, it's often easier to see what's *honorable* by defining what's *dishonorable*. Nearly any ordinary, productive life can be said to be "honorable," but that's not of much use when you're scratching your head with your pencil, trying to come up with an interesting story to challenge your Klingon Crew!

Think about a few distinctly dishonorable acts, and work from their mirror image: Cowardly attack (by poisoning, for example) is highly dishonorable, to the point of being

unthinkable for most Klingon warriors. So, an adventure that has an obvious "solution" via similar covert action makes an appropriate challenge for a Klingon group; they must find the more honorable, which in this case means the more *direct*, course of action.

Honorable adventure is never about the simplest or most comfortable path; it should often be about tricky choices, and should require cunning and creativity.

### *Victory is Everything Else!*

Another essential Klingon axiom, this shouldn't be interpreted as "the Crew always succeeds." Rather, it means that there should always be the *opportunity* for *victory*.

Klingons are not content to engage in passive tests of skill. In fact, Klingons don't consider such things "tests" at all. A Klingon seeks honorable *conflict* with worthy foes; only the presence of an enemy validates a test. The Klingons, a race of proud warriors, *need* foes, either aliens or other Klingons.

This axiom sets Klingon episodes in an entirely different direction than more traditional Federation-oriented *Star Trek,* in which "success" can take on many satisfying forms without ever including the satisfying thrill of a willing opponent. While the crew of a Galaxy-class vessel might be thrilled to solve a complex problem of a planet's ecology by performing tests, using their intuition, and then mounting an expedition into a deadly storm to set up a device to fix the problem, such an adventure would test a Klingon's patience more impressively than it would test his skills. Certainly, there are Klingon scientists and Klingon philosophers, and Klingons must solve mundane problems to survive, but Klingons aren't really *happy* or *excited* unless there is a foe to exchange words with, to exchange blows with, to battle for victory.

So, an ecological-disaster story isn't "out of bounds" for Klingon tales, far from it. To make the story feel properly Klingon, however, the ecological disaster must either give rise to a foe (a saboteur causing the disaster, perhaps, or a treacherous villain who profits from it and wants to insure that the problem isn't solved), or be combined with another plot that provides the necessary thrill of an enemy. Perhaps the suffering caused by the disaster simply attracts unsavory types who are a threat to the prosperity of the Empire, and who must be dealt with appropriately.

## Applying the Axioms in Design and Live Play

### *Mixing It Up*

For a change-of-pace episode in a Klingon series, it can be fun every once in a while to briefly subvert the Klingon axioms when a Klingon Crew is forced to come to grips with alien problems. By using an episode written explicitly for the crew of a Federation starship, and putting your Crew of Klingons there first, you can create an exciting game of "what-if?" where a problem that is presumed to be best solved by peaceful negotiation, compromise, tolerance and understanding is encountered by a people who find negotiation to be less preferable than an honorable fight, compromise to be a sign of weakness, and tolerance and understanding to be sometimes difficult concepts, rarely worth the effort when more important issues of the Empire are at hand.

Such adventures can make for an episode where the Klingons expand their horizons, where they find that it's essential to understand, at least for a time, more "alien" approaches to their situation. But what can make this kind of episode even *better* is when the Klingons can find a distinctly Klingon solution! The Human way works for the Federation, but it isn't the *only* way, and there are times when it's fun to show that the Klingon way can cut to the heart of the matter (sometimes literally!) much more quickly than talking and compromise. If you ever find yourself writing an episode designed to "teach" a Crew of Klingons that the Federation way is *better,* it's probably time to put the Klingon characters aside for a while and just run a Federation Crew instead. As a Klingon, it's no fun to encounter "lessons" like that - it's much cooler to show the galaxy that the Klingons have an ancient empire for a reason. The Klingon way *works.*

## Klingon Themes

*Star Trek* in general, and Klingon *Star Trek* in particular, is grounded in its axioms but given life by its themes. Like any other form of science fiction, *Star Trek* seeks to answer questions, explore issues, and expand the personal horizons of those enjoying it. This is no less true in the Klingon Series of the *Star Trek: the Next Generation* RPG, although some of the "questions" asked by the story will be very different. Episode Themes embody those questions.

Unlike the axioms, the themes are not *each* present in every episode; there are too many of them! Rather, a typical episode focuses primarily on just *one* theme, with a few others "playing around" in the subplots. Many of the themes are specific facets of the axioms; others *seem* contradictory (to each other, to the basic nature of Klingons, or to the axioms), but aren't really. Some of them overlap. All of them make for good stories.

The themes examined here are just some of the most outstanding examples; there are many more. While they aren't essential components of your episode; you'll find that being aware of them — and remembering to include them according to taste — will go a long way toward giving your Klingon episodes the right "feel."

### *Peace and Identity*

Since the Organian Treaty and (perhaps especially) Khitomer, Klingon culture has seen a good deal of upheaval, changes in their relationships with their interstellar neighbors that have rocked the foundations of Klingon society. In particular, many decades of peace had a lot of Klingons pacing the deck, anxious to get back to battle. "Warriors fight," as Worf said, and that's the most straightforward and explanation we're likely to find for the war with the Cardassians. This is a theme that has manifested in many forms throughout the show and the films, however, the idea that in peace, Klingons lose something vitally Klingon. That peace dilutes the Klingon identity, creates an atmosphere where it is difficult for them to thrive, to be happy. It could be said that a Klingon warrior cannot be at peace with *himself* unless he is at war with others.

This theme contains more than one question, so it can be explored in your series in different ways. Do Klingons really need conflict, or is peace a scapegoat, something to blame for an uneasy populace or an ailing economy? Do Klingons hunger for the fight itself, or do they most need the confirmation of their own abilities that can only come from

being tested in battle? Do Klingons fight to discover the truth, or to avoid it? To taste victory, or in hopes of meeting a truly superior foe who will defeat them? After all, the Klingons hold as truth that there is no dishonor in defeat by a superior foe, and that a slain warrior isn't a loss to be mourned, but rather a Klingon finally freed of the prison of mortal life.

Applications of this theme to episode design can be subtle (with opportunities for in-character reflection on "enforced" or otherwise undesired moments of peace) or it can be overt. There will be, naturally, times when peace is essential to survival, and most Klingons are smart enough to recognize when peaceful action is both preferable and honorable. Other Klingons not familiar with their situation might *not* be so clear-minded, however, and the Crew may find themselves mocked as being something *less* than true Klingons! The resulting scene can be rich in good hearty Klingon dialogue, since after all, vocally (and, if need be, physically) defending one's honor is the kind of things your players will want to enjoy now and then — it's a big part of what makes a fun Klingon story.

### *The Need to Expand*

While Klingons need to fight in order to feel truly Klingon, they feel the need to expand their boundaries if they are to live. Clearly, the two principles are linked, since if both are literally true then war becomes more than a matter of identity, it becomes an essential survival trait. Mara's observation that "we must push outward if we are to survive" continues to ring true though the years. Many of the Klingon worlds are resource-poor, and the proud race of warriors has had to take extreme measures to deal with poverty and starvation. Usually the Klingon martial tradition has dictated a simple and consistent plan: conquer, expand. When the land is overcrowded or can't produce enough food, find some enemies and take more worlds. Even in times of prosperity, this has remained a strong Klingon tendency, since conquest is not only often necessary, it is glorified. After all — it built the Empire!

Again, part of the question raised by this theme is the validity of its premise. Do Klingons really *need* to expand to survive, or do they do it because they're too busy fighting to become good farmers, or because they let personal matters of ego interfere with effective government? The answers are unlikely to be clear-cut and simple, and which answers the Crew's adventures imply will depend a good deal on the personal character of the Crew, and the point of view from which the story is told. In general, Klingons don't spend a lot of time bragging about their need to expand — Mara's expression of it was almost a confession. Rather, they take pride in the success that they've had in expanding, the resulting Empire. When faced directly with the question of *need*, even many proud Klingons might be given pause.

Of course, the best way to introduce this theme into an episode is to explore those times when the outward movement of the Empire is being thwarted or slowed in some way. This includes the Klingon answer to the exploration themes common in more Federation-oriented *Star Trek,* where Strange New Worlds await the Crew with sometimes-deadly, sometimes-enlightening (often both!) secrets to be encountered and dealt with. On the outer reaches of Klingon space, far from the Federation's meddling influences, there are worlds that known nothing about the galaxy around them, waiting to be met! Of course, this theme can be used metaphorically, too — the need to expand boundaries extends to

the personal and professional level, especially for a Warrior, who stands to benefit from broadening his influence and prestige, and stands to suffer if he stagnates.

### *Corruption*

The Klingon Empire is old and, in some ways, brittle. The Klingons themselves are prideful, and when pride goeth before a Klingon's fall, that fall is often hidden behind a web of lies. Fools, as Klingon proverbs teach, do not survive their folly, but they often manage to take many others with them when they go, and the weakness of a few has invited corruption into the heart of the Empire.

Corruption stories are stories about the dangers of personal weakness. Typically, they will involve the Crew working to undo the damage caused when a Klingon with some measure of personal power (or the means to attain it) gives in to his weaker side. There are always two negative forces to be reckoned with. The first is *The Corrupted,* the Klingon who has been overcome by fear, or ignorance, or shame, or a desire for personal gain at any cost. The second is *The Outside Force,* the "corrupter" that has either opportunistically zeroed in on the weakness of The Corrupted, or unwittingly provided the tools for his corruption. The third vital element of a corruption story is the *victims,* those hurt directly by the corruption. Typically, the victims are the ones who bring the Crew into the story (via a plea for help of some kind), and they sometimes contain the keys for the plot's resolution, as well. So, building a corruption episode is all about "casting the roles" in those three vital parts. Note that the "corrupter" needn't be a person or group — sometimes, it's just an opportunity.

Those who are corrupted are often tired, aging Klingons in positions of military or governmental authority, surviving in positions of power through manipulative political means, rather than as honorable warriors and leaders. Filled with self-loathing and well aware of their own weaknesses, they are corrupted because they are too tired, or too scared, to face the consequences of a more honorable approach to their loss of strength. Such characters are powerful because they are both dangerous and sad — many were once well respected, and the Crew may have to come to grips with tearing down an "idol" of sorts. Since such things must be done in a way that preserves the honor of the Empire and affected families if possible, this can add an additional wrinkle to the plot. Other potential candidates for corruption include the mirror image of the above: Young, brash Klingons who reject the ancient traditions and seek a quick path to power or glory are often seen indulging their weaknesses, and entirely unexpected sources of corruption (the faithful family handmaiden, the respected old historian and bat'leth instructor) can add an extra flavor of conspiracy to an episode. See what happens if the Crew's own commander succumbs to weakness! This makes for a good (if somewhat tragic and bittersweet) scenario when the Narrator decides that it's time the Crew themselves earn command of their vessel.

The outside, corrupting force can be as dramatic as a bed of Romulan spies, or as simple as a shipment of weapons that tempts the corrupted into taking dishonorable action. The corrupter can also be another Klingon, possibly the next "layer" in a web of corruption leading deeper into the halls of power. The corrupting element, whether it's an inanimate object or a cunning villain, seldom has any motives in common with the corrupted. If it has any motives at all, they are selfish and dangerous. In some stories, the corrupter is the "real" villain of the tale.

The choice of victims can have the most profound impact on the feel of the story, and are often chosen first. For one thing, they determine the *scale* of the action: If the victims are an isolated Klingon colony, then the corrupted Klingon can be anyone from a colonial governor to the commander of a visiting warship to a higher-up back on Quo'noS. If the victims are the crew of a single ship, the corrupted is likely a ranking officer. If the victims are the inhabitants of entire worlds, the corrupted may be very powerful, indeed.

### *Old Soldiers*

Not all aging Klingon warriors weaken and open themselves to dishonorable corruption, even in the most pessimistic Klingon series. Some go out with honor — taking on a vital role that ends in their death, glorious in battle. Some continue in denial, refusing to face that they are no longer fit to command, and become an innocent and tragic liability. Any of these and more can make for good Klingon drama, because Klingon warriors — while they celebrate the possibility of honorable death — loathe the idea of growing old and useless. Stories involving "old soldiers" explore a fundamental and unspoken fear common to the Klingons: What will *I* do if I somehow survive to the point where I am no longer fit to be a warrior?

Of course, this theme can be explored directly through flash-forward stories or "phenomenon" plots that age the Crew, but most stories exploring this theme put the Crew into contact with one or more aging Klingons who have faced the burning question in their own way. This can sometimes be a less sinister cousin of the corruption story, where the Crew must deal with the fact that a Klingon they admire is now a problem. As with a corruption plot, there are typically victims, but no outside agent or overtones of conspiracy or espionage. This is a dramatic way to "retire" a Klingon NPC without leaving a black stain on his memory or family honor. Other versions of the story can be fun adventure tales, as the Crew works to aid an "old soldier" or two as they undertake their mission with a clear intent to go out with a bang.

### *Pride and History*

These two concepts seem almost inseparable in the Klingon-oriented episodes of *Star Trek: the Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine*. From the challenge to Mogh's honor in "Sins of the Father" to the "resurrection" of Kahless the Unforgettable in "Rightful Heir," we have been shown many times that Klingons take pride in their history, and will go to extreme measures to maintain and protect that pride. Conversely, an old shame is a deep shame, and when delving into the past reveals dishonor, it can threaten the reputations of many generations of Klingons. Klingon history is a double-edged sword of sorts, something that all Klingons turn to for inspiration, solace, and a sense of self-worth, but carrying with it the potential to savagely undermine all those things and more.

This theme shows sharp contrast between Humans and Klingons, at least in dramatic terms. In a *Human*-oriented story about history and pride, the implied question is often "Is history part of what makes a man who he is?" There is no such question in the hearts of the Klingons; the answer is so strongly affirmative as to render the question redundant! Klingons are one with their history as surely as they are one with their living relatives, in a way that few non-Klingons understand. By exploring the questions that *that* raises, you and your Crew can come to understand Klingons even more, and have a great time doing it! What does honor demand when the spirit of the truth differs from the literal facts of the

past? To what extent is it right to re-write history to preserve the state of the present? How will your deeds *today* be viewed *tomorrow,* and by future generations? And remember that not every look into the Klingons' past needs to be a trek of disillusionment and pathos. There is greatness there, too, and your series will benefit if you have stories that explore all sides of the concept.

### *Strength in Unity*

Klingons draw strength from many sources; from their reverence for their traditions, from their strong sense of duty and honor, from their skill as warriors, even from their anger. But the most constant wellspring of Klingon strength is their unity. Klingons, at their best, are noble comrades-in-arms, living by oaths and allegiances as strong as their bonds of blood, fighting and shouting together, emerging victorious or finding their deaths as a single Empire, focused on doing what is right and honorable and necessary. When a Klingon rises through the ranks by killing a superior, it isn't because Klingons are treacherous — far from it! — it's because Klingons destroy the weak links that might do harm to the greater whole. Only the most able survive, as it should be, and the Empire is more glorious for it, and that much more deserving of undying loyalty and powerful unity.

Like any positive principle, the concept of Klingon Unity is best suited as a dramatic theme when it is tested, questioned or openly threatened. Have fun making the test personal: If the Crew is tempted by opportunities that would grant each one personal gain over the good of their comrades, will they take the bait, or hang together? Or trying working it into something with a grander scope: If the Empire suffers from dissention within, what can be done to heal it, to bring Klingons together as they should be? If the unity of the whole is weakening, giving itself over to selfishness, apathy and dishonor, is seeking out a new external enemy the way to make Klingons Klingon again? Nothing pulls *any* species together like a common enemy, after all. This is a theme that "scales" well; it can be explored in anything from a story of personal vendettas to an epic, galactic-scale series arc.

### *Vengeance*

One of the most common Klingon themes explored on the air in *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine,* the right (and even the responsibility) to avenge a wrong is a powerful and deeply-rooted Klingon concept. This is a very useful theme for Narrators, because it provides strong motivation for action. Fighting is well and good, but fighting to alleviate a terrible itch is much better — every blow has meaning; the outcome is something to be celebrated, or mourned. Given a reasonable motive for honorable revenge, your players may astonish you with their ability to roleplay a driving passion. Anger excites Klingons, and roleplaying anger excites players who like playing Klingons.

There are several questions burning in this theme. 'What *requires* vengeance?' is a big one: The Klingons hold that an *honorable* death never requires vengeance, and for good reason. Any other approach would threaten to crumble the Empire in a tangle of messy blood-feuds. Acts of dishonor — from cruelty to cowardice — *do* justify vengeance, and dishonor that causes the death of the honorable essentially demands it. While Klingons believe that dishonor is ultimately paid for, they tend not to leave it up to fate, preferring to quench the fires of anger in the blood of the deserving. Many other questions deal with the appropriate *nature* of the vengeance. While Klingons don't insist on a poetic "fitting the crime"

approach to revenge, they do demand that vengeance itself must be pursued with honor — methods that threaten the innocent or methods that use dishonorable tactics are just as bad as the act that inspired the quest for revenge in the first place, and are not tolerated by most Klingons.

The most obvious way to bring vengeance into an episode as a Theme is to give the players cause for pursuing a little vengeance of their own, or to put the dagger in the other hand, and have the players sought out as the targets of another Klingons seeking revenge *against* them. In the latter case, the crimes that the Crew are accused of may be misunderstandings, and the goal of the adventure may be to convince the offended party of the wrongness of their pursuit (without making things worse by harming his pride!). But then again they may not be. If the Crew ever acts carelessly or dishonorably, let them feel the sweat on the back of their necks as they must deal with the consequences (but give them a chance to redeem their honor, too). Also, since Klingons are held responsible for the actions of their family (and vice-versa) they may be sought out for vengeance for the deeds of another — which can lead to issues of self-preservation in the face of standing Klingon tradition about the role of familial responsibility, and questioning such basic principles is one of the things that makes *Star Trek* great. Of course, vengeance stories can be told from the *outside*, too. Interfering, for whatever reason, in the blood-oaths of other Klingons (who are, perhaps, overstepping the bounds of honorable vengeance) can make for exciting Klingon/Klingon conflict.

### *Inner Demons*

In "The Heart of Glory," Worf said that the true test of a warrior is not without — it is within. This final theme — that of the warrior doing battle with his own nature while working hard to remain true to it, seems to at least sit at the edges of every Klingon drama, and it occasionally takes the forefront. Worf and other Klingons have spoken of "listening to their blood" and "the voice of the Warrior" as well. These more positive metaphors still point to a strong issue of importance to Klingons. They outline the idea that there is much of importance on the *inside*. A warrior must deal successfully with his inner self — embracing some urges, rejecting others — before he can come into his own as an individual, and as a contributor to the causes he fights for.

When does a good Warrior know when the voices he hears in his head and heart are honorable passions to be obeyed, and when they are inner demons that need to be defeated and purged from the blood? Tradition, ritual, and past experience are the guideposts, but the territory can still be rough, and the consequences of a wrong answer can be fatal (and worse, shameful).

This is a theme best explored with a well-defined Crew with a few episodes under their belt. As the Series progresses, pay close attention to how each character develops, in order to pinpoint the internal issues that are most likely to work with your group. This is a very individual exercise, which means it's difficult to lay down simple rules for it, but also that it's potentially far more rewarding than any of the other themes discussed above. At first, introduce this theme as a minor one, subordinate to stronger plot-points (it's easy to tie this one directly *to* the larger themes, too). This will put the development in the hands of the players, where it belongs, and the way they roleplay the "minor" looks at their Klingon Crews' inner conflicts will lay the groundwork for building episodes which explore the issue in detail.

It's important to remember that while this theme is a rich vein to be mined that will make your Klingon series more exciting on every level, it should never be about simple introspection! *Star Trek* should always be action-packed, and that means that the inner conflicts should arise when stimulated by external choices, choices with real and preferably dangerous consequences!

## It *Is* A Good Day to Die!

Here's one last topic, not quite an axiom or theme, for Narrators to think seriously about. Narrating a Klingon series requires a fresh attitude towards the concept of character death. Klingons don't mourn the death of a warrior, they celebrate it. They howl a warning into the realm of the dead, to let it be known that a Klingon warrior is on the way, freed of the flesh and triumphant. To what extent should this be reflected in your players' attitudes toward the death of their characters?

The loss of a cherished RPG character isn't something that anybody can take entirely lightly. As role-players, we invest pieces of ourselves into our fictional personae, no matter how different from us they might be (even the most "alien" entity needs a few points we can identify with, after all, or we won't care about it). That said, the dramatic, and meaningful death of a character can be one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences you can have involving pencils and dice, and what better way to explore that idea than with a Klingon? Honorable death in battle is said to be the wish of any true Klingon warrior. Is it?

The words "dramatic" and "meaningful" bear repeating. There are many times in a game when it's very appropriate to ignore the rules and let the story go where it needs to, and the death of a Klingon warrior is certainly one of those times. If a Klingon dies unexpectedly in a pitched battle, don't simply say "You're dead now; would you mind refilling my Coke as long as you're up?" the instant his wound level drops to "Killed." If the prevailing mood is right for it, let the slaughtered warrior perform a single, meaningful act before he dies — a lusty curse, at least, or perhaps a killing blow to the one who has slain him, so they can die together, as foes. Comparably, if a Klingon is obviously willingly sacrificing himself for an honorable goal, don't require a lot of die-rolls to let him get the deed done. If he's making that kind of choice, let him make it, and let him succeed unless it's entirely unreasonable that he could (and maybe even then)! Deaths that have a real effect aren't mourned by most gamers any more than they are mourned by most Klingons. Rather, they are celebrated, and spoken of time and again in tales around the gaming table for years to come.

Of course, while all this potential for drama is very real, it's unwise for the Narrator to *deliberately* plot to bring about the death of a character, or to design an episode that requires a member of the Crew to lay down his life at some point. A notable exception to this rule is when a player must leave the Series for real-life reasons — then it can be fun to write him a good, dramatic "last episode!" Normally, though, the best path is to let such instances occur naturally, since in the violent world of the Klingons, they will certainly happen eventually. Klingon characters most likely will die more often than Federation ones, and it's a good idea for everybody to understand that fact, embrace it, and explore the dramatic potential of a Klingon's final path to freedom.

# To Serve and Protect

Security stories combine many of the best elements of *Star Trek* in a single package, since deduction, science, teamwork, and physical action — all in healthy measure — are necessary for success. Security — both as a character role and as a dramatic theme — have always been a part of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

However, placing Starfleet's security specialists at the *center* of a story will, in many ways, be Going Where No Episode Has Gone Before. This chapter is designed both as a creative aid for Narrators designing a security-centered *Star Trek* series, and as a general reference for Narrators of *any* kind of *Star Trek* series looking to inject more action and drama into their ongoing game!

## The Security Plot

The Federation is threatened every day. A flood on Alpha Centauri traps thousands and kills hundreds . . . a desperate coup by Nausicaan terrorists turns a starbase into a battle zone . . . two unexplained murders at the Rakosa IV research station means there's a killer on the loose.

Starfleet security, in its incarnations ranging from plainclothes policemen to the rangers and rapid-response teams serving in deep space, exists to deal with all these threats, and more. Their stories are the detective adventures, cop dramas, and special-forces peacekeeping missions of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* RPG.

Despite the bewildering variety of story possibilities, this is a "sub-genre" of *Star Trek* that really thrives on a few basic plot formulae, any of which can be modeled well using the basic three-act structure presented in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* rulebook. This is good news for the Narrator; it means you can have fun focusing on the details and the *personal* sides of the story. That's where each episode will sink or swim, since threats, all by themselves, are a dime a dozen (in a moneyless economy, they're even cheaper).

Structurally, the variables of the "threat episode" boil down to three categories, determined by how *immediate* the threat is. Essentially, there are "before," "during," and "after" stories, each with their own advantages, limitations, and special requirements.

### *Ounces of Prevention: Before*

Starfleet gets lucky, and learns of an impending threat while it's still busy "impending." The episode that results springs from this revelation — a "tip-off" from an arms smuggler near the Neutral Zone, perhaps — a former accomplice of the villain, left to the mercy of the law and willing to spill. Or maybe the tip comes from remote sensors, readings indicating tremors where no tremors should be, or strange energies, increasing in magnitude at an alarming rate. Trouble is brewing, and it will be here soon. The Crew must prevent (or, worst-case, minimize) the damage that the new threat will cause.

Prevention stories offer their own unique set of roleplaying opportunities. Often, threats dealt with in the "before" stages are cooperative ventures between Security and other branches and divisions. If sensor reading indicate a quake preparing to wreck a Vulcan colony, security (working to aid evacuations, and prevent nearby criminals from preying on the colony in its weakened state) will work alongside scientists and engineers, who will be combating the quake and it's effects directly. If the threat is more military in nature, coordination between security's "ground connections" and the more "naval" arm of Starfleet can make for exciting games of tactics and resource-management. If the threat is a crime, the need for navigating the underworld societies that exist on the fringes of Federation society provides the opportunity to meet many colorful NPCs.

"Before" stories can make good open-ended episodes in a series where the Narrator likes to play fast and loose with the "script" and let the story move in unexpected directions. If the Crew succeeds in heading off the oncoming threat, the story can conclude at the climax . . . But if the characters *fail,* the story can be rolled over into a two-parter, with the follow-up "during" episode exploring new themes and giving the Crew another chance to make things right. Since so much is undefined in the prevention stage, the Narrator has more "wiggle-room" to improvise this kind of shift. The sense of mystery is much more pronounced in this kind of episode.

It's that very air of mystery, however, that can threaten the energy and pacing of this kind of story. Since the threat is often an unknown until halfway through the story (or later), the rise of tension depends entirely on the careful pacing of revelations, foreshadowing, and the presence of an interesting supporting cast. Some players, hungry for more immediate challenges, can find this kind of play frustrating. These "problems" are really just thinly disguised opportunities for the savvy Narrator, though, provided he keeps his players' tastes constantly in mind. If some of the Crew needs more regular action, just about any threat (even entirely natural ones) come equipped with "satellite" dangers that can act as a visceral kind of omen, or carry new revelations along with a little excitement.

### *Clear and Present Dangers: During*

It's heralded by a klaxon, an explosion, a sudden loss of power, a disruptor shot . . . The threat is here; the danger is immediate; the Crew are needed. Sometimes, there's enough warning in the episode "teaser" to give the Crew a chance to mobilize, grab some equipment, evaluate the problem, and be dispatched on their "mission," and sometimes there isn't. When things hit hard and fast, they just need to do what they can with whatever state the fates (dressed suspiciously like the Narrator) have left them in.

The advantages of the here-and-now threat are many. Typically, the plot begins with the first sign of trouble (or the assignment of a mission) and continues to escalate, building excitement at every scene. Run properly, it can be seat-of-the-pants excitement, with the characters pushed to their limits by whatever fiendish challenge the Narrator has decided to unleash.

But this "During" story carries an equal measure of pitfalls, too. The most common is simple overexposure: too many stories focusing directly on threats can lay a series flat and leech the flavor from it. On TV, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* avoided "threat of the week syndrome" by combining the threats with vital character subplots, and most of all, by keeping pure "threat" episodes down to less than half of the total episode-count.

That's not the *only* way, though. *Scale* is another tool in the Narrator's arsenal. Keep the majority of the threats *small* and *personal,* and they can be constant without dulling the senses. Save the planet-scale dangers for keynote episodes and major finales; spend the rest of the series exploring where the TV series didn't often get to — the day-to-day problems that Security must deal with, the kind of stories that can have profound effect on the characters involved, because the lives at stake are those of individuals, instead of abstract millions.

### *The Fun Never Ends: After*

Lives have already been taken. The colony is a charred ruin. The battles have ended, and the dead are being counted. But there are still questions . . . Is this really the end, or a calm before another storm? Who committed the crime? Where have they gone? What will they do next? When Security is needed in the aftermath of a threat, it means that security is still in question. The "After" story is the trickster of the trio, because, while it might really be "After," it's just as likely to be a sneaky kind of "Before" or even a sudden "During." And the Crew must stay on their guard and find out.

There are many kinds of "after" stories. In the aftermath of a theft, the thieves must be pursued and the thing they've stolen returned safely. In the aftermath of a disaster of some kind, survivors must be tended to and protected. In the aftermath of a murder or other atrocity, a mystery might need to be solved, especially if there's a chance that the criminal is still operating freely.

"After" stories are an opportunity to show off many of the responsibilities Security must shoulder that don't involve direct threats. Security keeps peace, enforces laws, and provides aid to those in need. Sometimes, nothing can be done about the damage, but a lot can be done about healing it, rectifying it, or making sure it never happens that way again.

While the nature of the challenge in an aftermath story is highly variable and often uncertain, this kind of plot sidesteps the problems that "before" episodes face by giving the Crew something concrete to dig their imaginations into, right from the start. In fact, more than any other kind of episode, "After" stories can be used to play wicked games with players' tendency to make assumptions!

In fact, it's a wicked game that is often *essential.* One of the difficulties in devising good "after" stories is building towards a satisfying climax without resorting, every time, to simply re-heating the established threat and serving it as leftovers. On the trail of a murderer, the players will *expect* that the murderer himself is the threat to be dealt with — so give them something else to deal with! It can be chilling to discover that the "murderer" was simply defending himself all along, and that those he killed were the hosts of the genuine threat, a being taking control of sentient minds. Or maybe the murderer really *was* a murderer, and he's easily caught, but he's smug, bragging about the dozens more that will die from something he's already done. He wants to bargain for his freedom, and he's holding all the cards . . . The possibilities are many, and never forget that, until the credits roll, nothing is set in stone. Never shy away from improvising a new twist, if you're sharp enough to keep it all consistent.

#### Odd Combos and Challenged Assumptions

This chapter provides a lot of "shopping" lists of ideas and concepts, different ways of breaking down the many possibilities inherent in security and threat-oriented *Star Trek* stories, provided for Narrators in need of inspiration. A really fun way to make an episode interesting is to simply run down each list, grabbing items at random, or even going for those that seem the *least likely* to fit well together, and then apply the goulash to a simple premise. Challenge the basic assumptions of the genre. Search this chapter for rules and principles, and take a mallet to each one of them!

## Sympathy for the Devil: Motivated Foes

In *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, villains are never simply *villains.* Black hats and twirling mustaches, followed by a sound heroic thrashing and a hearty cheer, are contrary to the spirit and ethos of the show. This was true in the Original Series, when such landmark episodes as "Devil in the Dark" showed audiences that even *monsters* are best dealt with by understanding them. *The Next Generation* maintained and developed this philosophy in episodes like "Home Soil." When a *Star Trek* "villain" dies, it's typically an act of *self*-destruction. Either he forces the hand of the *Enterprise* crew by directly threatening the lives of many, or literally brings about his own doom rather than surrender to his captors. In all such cases, the result is tragedy — not a moment to celebrate a "victory."

This "Sympathy for the Devil" is a *Star Trek* axiom, every bit as pervasive and fundamental as those discussed on p.162 of the *Star Trek: TNG* rulebook. It's especially important to a Security story, because it's a vital difference between *Star Trek* and more ordinary law-enforcement/security oriented science fiction. In *Star Trek,* the goal is never to "shoot the bad guy." In *Star Trek,* the "bad guy" has an understandable motive (or is mechanical, like the "doomsday device" or the Borg, and therefore stripped of real "motive" entirely), and the goal is to provide safety and security for the citizens of the Federation, using the most peaceful means possible.

The villain's motive should be one that the players can empathize with, even if they disagree with his chosen means of pursuing it (and they probably will). Coming to understand that motive — and bridging the gap in understanding between the threat and the Crew, should be a key to the successful resolution of the mission. In simpler stories, it can even *be* the resolution.

Pure, unreasoning hatred — the closest thing there is to fairy-tale "evil," is rare in the real world, and even rarer in *Star Trek* (Armus, in "Skin of Evil," is probably the closest thing *Star Trek: The Next Generation* ever got to it). Usually, "evils" are committed by those who believe themselves to be doing something worthy. A sampling of the many possible "villainous" motives:

***Cultural:*** One of the best parts of *Star Trek* gaming is getting to meet new and distinct alien cultures, and learning more about the established ones from the show. Sometimes, though, learning about new aliens can be a dangerous experience, when alien morality and the Federation "baseline" are found to differ. Sometimes, traditions that are considered "everyday" to an alien are deadly to others, creating a threat that must be dealt with very carefully. And sometimes, even a Starfleet officer must balance his loyalty to Starfleet with his loyalty to his culture — ancient blood-feuds and other matters of personal honor can

sometimes seem more important than Starfleet duty, and once that crosses a line, another threat is created. This is an excellent opportunity for the Narrator and players to explore many of the themes of *Star Trek*, since resolutions of such problems typically require a healthy blend of action, quick thinking, and empathy on the part of the crew.

***Misguided by Others:*** Sometimes the "villain" believes himself to be acting heroically, because he's being duped by a persuasive outside element of some kind. Sometimes, the "puppeteer" pulling the antagonist's strings is the "real" villain of the piece, sometimes it's a case of the blind leading the blind, with all parties being deluded or misled in some way, leaving a deadly tangle for the Crew to unravel.

***Money and Power:*** While Federation citizens are seldom troubled by greed, many hundreds of species the Federation retains friendly relations with are still dealing with the consequences of money-driven economies. A desire for wealth or property for its own sake can drive people to sometimes-terrible measures. And when the stakes rise beyond mere property, even the rare Starfleet officer can succumb. Although "unbalanced" personalities are rare in 24th century humanity, the loss and trauma some brave officers experience in the line of duty can cause sufficient emotional damage later in life. This is the stuff of serious drama, and if your players are up to it, it can be very rewarding. Such damage can be hard to prevent or catch in time, particularly when a dire conflict (such as the Borg invasion) is keeping everybody busy.

***Loneliness:*** Lone criminals, alien monsters, even attacking *armies* can be motivated by desire for contact, the opportunity to communicate, the almost-universal sentient need for affection and good company. Of course, some express their needs in unfortunate ways! Very powerful aliens who "don't know their own strength" can kill with their idea of a friendly hug, and deadly madmen can twist a need for love into a dangerous kind of obsessive hatred. Some alien cultures may be so deeply rooted in centuries of warfare that combat is literally the way they greet a potential ally.

***Redemption:*** Two wrongs don't make a right, but people keep trying anyway. This motive typically drives a single, focused sentient – somebody who believes he's (a) made a terrible mistake and (b) has found a way to rectify it, or at least do something that "balances the scales" in some way. Of course, when (b) explodes into a matter than concerns Starfleet, it's because the perpetrator is putting his own need to redeem himself above all moral concerns, or is honestly ignorant of the damage he's doing.

***Immortality:*** Those who steal, kill, or destroy to attain eternal life are motivated by the fear of death, not by the love of living. Provided the Crew realizes this, it becomes an important and dramatic weakness to exploit, and a special challenge to those attempting diplomatic solutions. Such villains, long used to rationalizing their quest on the basis of rational self-preservation or some other principle, can rarely be persuaded with reason, and typically must be hoist on their own petard, defeated by their own terror or shortsighted arrogance.

***Species Preservation:*** From the classic days of pulp science fiction, "Mars Needs Women" is a theme that has been redressed and explored in dozens of stories, including several *Star Trek* episodes. And while aliens kidnapping other species because they need breeding stock is a bit *too* cliché, there's plenty of meat left on those bones. The Narrator, after all, has three very broad variables to define: the nature and abilities of the alien species itself,

the special *need* that that drives them to become a threat, and the unusual method they've devised to have it met. This can form the basis of some fascinating episodes that blend elements of puzzle-solving, alien diplomacy, and creepy mystery. Sometimes, an amicable exchange is possible ("You don't need to *attack* us if you need phaser energy to undergo macromitosis . . . We'd be happy to line you up and shoot you as a prelude to a cultural exchange.")

***Survival:*** From species preservation, we can move on to simple *self*-preservation. Rather than pursuing a need, the "threat" of the episode is responding to a threat of its own — sometimes a threat posed by the Crew itself. Typically, the theme explored here is one of the dangers of poor communication. What seems like a "monster" or an attack or even a natural phenomenon is revealed, by stages, to be somebody (or a lot of somebodies) trying to protect their young, or to ward off the deadly Federation ships that are slaughtering them with secondary radiations from the transporter beam. And sometimes, the threat is as simple as an ordinary man, stowing away for shelter, or stealing because he or his family are hungry.

***Escape:*** The Federation's penal colonies are build to provide rehabilitative environments; they're humane and comfortable. But that doesn't mean prisoners are eager to stay in them! The Crew may be called on to deal with escape problems of any scale, from wholesale colony riots to the flight of a single fugitive. Escape attempts often take place while the prisoner(s) is still *en route* to his destination colony, as well. Often, it's the last reasonable chance to grab for freedom! Note that while "escape," all by itself, is sufficient motive to drive a story's antagonist, secondary motives making for juicy plot-wrinkles. Some prisoners like to escape with style — stealing a starship and engaging in piracy on the way out, perhaps. Some others don't consider their escape complete until they've exacted revenge on those who put them away.

***Intellectual Pursuits:*** Some of those who'll threaten the Crew will be motivated by scientific curiosity, or self-righteous intent to demonstrate a point, or a quest for an intellectual challenge. Q, one of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s most popular recurring foils, is frequently motivated by all of the above, depending on the occasion, but such threats can come from more "mortal" directions, as well. Scientists who need a starship-sized petri dish to test their latest experiment, ennui-driven madmen who need a challenge "worthy" of their intellect, and other examples of science, philosophy, and social discourse taken a step too far are a rich tradition of the genre.

## Personal Drama

So far, we've examined the security story from the middle of things — the issue of security itself. Define the threat and the circumstances, and the plot can built itself neatly around the problem and the possible solutions to it. But while the plot is essential to any episode, it's only the platform on which the *real* story — a story about the Crew meeting challenges on a personal level — will be built. If the only motives that drive an episode are the motives of the antagonist, the Crew will feel secondary. If, on the other hand, the Crew's own motives are involved, and their own ideals and abilities tested in a way that makes the story uniquely their own, the bare-bones plot that we started with will come to life in a way that belies its simplicity. The result will be a complete, engaging, and memorable *Star Trek* "security" episode.

The players will do a lot of the legwork in this direction *for* you. They do so from character creation onward, by listing and then exploring their characters' weaknessec, strengths, virtues, principles, desires, fears, and back±rounds. And no matter how straightforward and visceral the episode's premise is ("A rabid Altair Rungabeast is loose on deck five. Bring it back alive,") their reactions, solutions, and interactions will make the event a personal one, at least to a degree. With some planning during the episode-design stage, though, the Narrator can elevate a simple action story to something worthy to stand shoulder-to-shoulder next to the best episodes of the TV series, by weaving the Crew's personalities and histories directly into the fabric of the threat.

Use what you know (or what you're comfortable inventing; see sidebar) about a character's weaknesses, desires, fears and background to *challenge* his strengths, virtues and principles. You don't need to plumb the depths of your soul or get all arty on them or anything, either; it needn't be a big-deal melodrama every episode. "Just a dab will you," as they say. The Centauran doesn't touch drugs of any kind? Will he take them if he needs to keep his cover while investigating a murder? Will he function well enough to save a friend's life in the next scene if the answer is "yes?" Will he be able to bluff his way through if the answer is "no?" And what's that? Time for the Vulcan to undergo *Pon Farr* again (seven years already)? What if that same Vulcan is the only hope for a group of stranded refugees, who need not only protection, but a voice of leadership to keep them from fighting amongst themselves out of desperate fear?

The major decisions of the story should provide opportunities to learn more about the characters making them. Delight in their torture. Provided they come by their misery honestly, and are given a fair shot at dealing with it, they'll delight in it, too. It lets them shine in play, not just as competent officers, but as well-rounded characters. It makes the tale immediate, real, and *theirs.* It becomes an episode that couldn't possibly be about any other Crew. And every time you do it, they'll reveal and establish more about their officers, and that's more grist for the mill. More torture, and more delight, for next time.

The specifics, of course, depend on your Crew — that's the point. While the earliest episodes you run will, necessarily, be a little drier on the personal side of things, it won't take long before there are dozens of character-based threads to weave into any storyline you devise. The Narrator's role tends to morph over time, from He Who Must Come Up With Stuff into a more relaxing He Who Gets To Choose From All The Juicy Options. For the early sessions (and for ideas later on), keep in mind these broad categories of personal connections, and examine the Crew to see how each one can be included.

- ***Principles and Ideals:*** In order to succeed, a character must violate (or at least consider violating) a principle he holds dear — perhaps one he's never had to question before. By the story's end, he may have a *revised* principle, or a strongly-reinforced one!
- ***A Stake on Both Sides:*** Sometimes a threat's defeat can be a personal loss. This happens when somebody or something one of the Crew cares about *depends* on the threat in some way, or even *is* the threat. Sure the terrorists need to be taken down, but one of those terrorists is the Tellarite's *sister,* who went off to follow a radical cult because she resented her brother's entry into Starfleet . . . And to make matters worse, she's helping force the situation into an all-or-nothing battle, where only death will resolve things.

- ***Chinks in the Armor:*** If a player is generous enough to define (or reveal in play) some really juicy weaknesses in his officer — a dread fear, a nagging self-doubt that could cripple him in the clutch, a temptation he must fight to avoid, a memory that haunts him — the Narrator owes that player the courtesy of a bonfire in which that weakness will be thrown and tested. These "chinks" can even be positive *goals,* if the character wants it so sincerely that it hurts . . . Geordi's desire for "real" eyesight drove several subplots in this way, as did Data's quest for humanity. In *Generations,* this would cripple his ability to act, and while Soran provided the overt conflict in the scene, it was Data grappling with terror that gave the scene its real drama. Your own NPC antagonists should (without ever realizing it) serve a similarly "subservient" role, existing as platforms for the Crew's own development and definition.

**Retrofit Connections**

A security/threat episode gains depth and reality when the challenges and personal subplots build on details established in prior episodes, or those written into the characters when they were created, rather than details that the Narrator assigns by fiat. "By the way, Ensign Cavendish spent a lot of his youth on the Kabora II colony fighting with alcoholism, so this strikes a chord with him."

Judiciously used, however, the occasional "invented" connection to the story can be very effective. In the early days of a series, when the characters are still only half-molded, it can be necessary to "jump-start" a personal connection to the story. As long as the players are up to that particular jump, the benefits can be enormous, and endure well beyond the episode at hand.

Understand and respect the boundaries of each player's creation. You'll have better luck writing in details about the distant past than about the present ("You once owned a cat just like this one" will go over better than "You have six cats and the Captain doesn't know about them"). Details that flatter are more acceptable than those that diminish ("You and the lovely insurgent leader once had a love affair" rather than "You were responsible for your father's death in a transporter accident.") And as a fallback, never forget that few players mind having relatives invented for them to care about, provided you don't do it every week!

## Themes and Stories

A *Next Generation* security episode is still *Star Trek*; all the themes basic to the show remain as guideposts for the construction of new episodes. There are, however, new themes particular to this style of play. Security encompasses a rich set of sub-genres: detective stories, paramilitary action, cop drama, and more. Each of these has a body of traditional stories all to itself, but there's a lot of overlap. Most "police drama" plots work equally well as "military drama," since the themes of both (preserving peace and order) are identical. The differences, if there are any at all, are matters of scale. Starfleet regards military action as a last resort because military action is what happens when security measures *fail.* A *Next Generation* campaign should reflect this.

What follows is only a sampling of the many challenges that Starfleet Security must face; combine the items on this list with the motives and angles explored above, and the resulting "menu" is many thousands of episodes.

***The Hostage Situation:*** One sentient (or several) wants something bad enough to have kidnapped an innocent victim. Usually, the victim is a living hostage, but sometimes, powerful objects, or unique ones (the results of a long scientific project, for example, or a work of art) stand in for the more traditional screaming child or civilian bystander. The Crew must secure the safety of the hostage, before the kidnapper gets more desperate and does harm.

***Guard Duty:*** This begins as a passive assignment: a place or thing is *potentially* in peril, and the Crew are placed nearby to deter the potential beast from rearing an actual head. Obviously, something goes wrong, or there is no episode, but this is an excellent time to play "mess with expectations" again. Sometimes, the thing being guarded presents its *own* problems, for example!

***The Heist:*** Something has been stolen. The thieves are long gone. The Crew must locate the stolen item, and preferably the thieves. Interesting wrinkles can arise when the thieves (or those they're stealing for) have a legitimate need for, or *claim to*, the stolen item. And sometimes the Crew can find the thieves — but the item is gone again, perhaps stolen by another party entirely, perhaps sold or passed on.

***Tests and Proofs:*** The crew must prove themselves or their unit in the face of a performance evaluation, a special test, or a simulation (doing a role-reversal, where the Crew gets to test the security of a ship or building by trying to *defeat* it, can be lots of fun). Sometimes, this is just a fun change of pace (having something go wrong and the "test" turn deadly is a popular twist). But sometimes evaluations happen for more serious reasons than maintaining *esprit de corps* or updating a duty roster. If somebody is determined to shut the Crew's unit down (or is gunning for the reputation of a single member *in* it), this can provide real drama and excellent springboards for character development. And what if it's not sinister at all, and the Crew's unit really *has* become superfluous in some way? Will they fight for their cohesion as a unit, or for the truth?

***Escort Detail:*** Like "Guard Duty" in motion! This opens up new plot possibilities: the ship/ground caravan/prisoner/etc. can get lost or thrown off course (taking the Crew with it), or the route itself can provide unexpected challenges that have nothing *directly* to do with the thing being escorted. Opportunities for layer on layer of complications are plentiful, if the Narrator is in a playful mood.

***On the Case:*** This is an open-ended sort of plot that can form a tight single episode or provide the arc for a whole *series.* The Crew is assigned the case of a single criminal, rogue, or dangerous enemy, a character or group with a history of damage. Maybe others have tried solving the problem and failed — or maybe Security has only now put all the pieces together and identified the source of a long-running series of problems. Either way, it's a game of cat-and-mouse (or even hunt-and-destroy) but the blade, as they say, cuts both ways, and the quarry should be a worthy adversary.

***The Corrupt Officer:*** An officer in the Crew's own unit has been corrupted, or is abusing his authority in some way. Sometimes, it's just a man cracking from pressure or trauma,

but sometimes it's subtler . . . even some Federation citizens can be corrupted with the right temptation put before them, or the right *threat* leveled against them. And if the Crew are the only ones who *realize* the character has gone bad, it can be hard going (and emotional drama), especially if the "rogue" is a senior officer.

***The Crime Wave:*** The Security equivalent of the "weird phenomenon" story common in the TV show. A series of security problems begin to mount and form a pattern: something is wrong, and the wake of it begins pointing in a single direction. The Crew are in the middle of it all, dealing at first with the isolated incidents, and then closing in on the heart of the matter: the mastermind, the conspiracy, the overly-ambitious thief.

***Into the Fire:*** This kind of story puts the players into the middle of a situation gone wrong, right from the episode's teaser: *While helping disaster victims, they and a dozen civilians are caught in a cave-in* (for example). The episode begins with the cave-in; the disaster-relief effort is just backstory, and the episode focuses on the Crew's efforts to keep the innocents safe and get everybody out of the mess they're in. One of the easiest plots to design; this provides meaty opportunities of all kinds and works well for a "pickup" or improvised session, if the need arises.

***Rendering Aid:*** Of course, disaster-relief (and other forms of civil aid) needn't be backstory. Disasters on any scale from a bombed building to a planetary apocalypse create the need for security officers. They're needed to keep the survivors calm, to rescue survivors who's safety is still threatened, to deal with new threats and predators that disasters tend to attract, and work with other Federation offices and Starfleet branches to bring the best out of chaos.

***The Specialist:*** This is often a subplot, secondary to the episode's "main" theme. The Crew don't get to handle the job alone; they are asked to work with somebody new, a specialist brought in to provide aid with unique training or talents. This can be anything from a psionic or other character with special senses to a very competent member of a secretive branch. Sometimes, the character is just there to provide an arc of ego-tension building to acceptance and camaraderie (fun to role-play!), but sometimes the "specialist" is a genuine problem, or even tied to the episode's primary threat.

***The Whodunit:*** A crime or atrocity has been committed, leaving a dangerous question or two hanging in the air which the Crew must answer. Sometimes, a whodunit is literally a question of "who?" But "whydunits" and "howdunits" are excellent variations on the theme. Secondary questions ("Will it happen again soon? Where? To whom?") typically keep things creepy and tense.

***Undercover:*** In order to gain information, make contact with a hard-to-reach NPC, or get close enough to a threat to deal with it, the Crew must disguise themselves as people they're not, typically learning (very quickly) to master the etiquette of a new culture or social group into the bargain! Coupled with another form of plot, this adds new dimensions to the role-playing, and can allow characters to have a lot of fun "acting against type" as a change of pace.

***Trial and Punishment:*** The Crew become involved in the process of trying a captured criminal — usually as key witnesses called on to help the Federation render fair judgement. The drama tends to focus on the events of the courtroom itself, as parties who want to see

the guilty found innocent (or vice-versa!) try to manipulate the proceedings. The Crew must do their part to see that the right decision is made. Naturally, this kind of episode makes a good sequel, if the criminal on trial is one the Crew have captured themselves!

***First In:*** When a dangerous new world is discovered, or the stronghold of an enemy is left standing in the wake of a conflict, or some other potentially-hazardous new place becomes a concern of the Federation, brave members of Starfleet are sent in to assess the hazards and (if possible) make the place safe. Security is always an important part of such operations, and when things go wrong, things can *really* go wrong.

***The Surprise Attack:*** Out of nowhere, an enemy strikes, and the Crew must defend themselves and those around them. Like "Into the Fire," this is another kind of story where the backstory is provided briefly, and the Crew is immediately thrust into the thick of the danger, often unawares. Sometimes, the attack and its immediate consequences fuel the entire episode. Sometimes, it's a prelude to another kind of story entirely.

# Mirror Andoria

Shieri turned Ghalev's corpse with her foot to look at his frozen expression of shock. She grinned wickedly. "Falin, we were brilliant. To think the little fool trusted us."

Falin held her close, thrilled at her attention, the warm satisfaction of the kill. "He *could* have trusted us, if he'd only turned his talents to the Emperor's service. His pride was wasted, misplaced." He stared down, feeling a little sad for his former comrade.

He spoke as much to the cooling body as to Shieri. "We are Andorian, the dagger of imperial will."

Shieri kissed Falin softly. "The Senator will be so pleased, my love."

- Douglas Bell,
*Falin: a Novel of Andoria*, 2253

Andoria is a frozen world orbiting a white subgiant deeply coreward from the heart of the empire. Ruled by a royal family descended from an ancient conqueror, the Andorians are passionate and artistic, but their favorite art is war. Personal squabbles are settled with blood in public duels, where the stink of death and alcohol mingle with screams and hearty laughter. Lusty warriors all, the Andorian rulers maintain the fabric of their society with constant warfare, the pursuit that brings all Andorians together as brothers, and dutiful servants of the Emperor.

Of all the vassal worlds, Andoria is the most openly-worshipful of humanity (or at least, the most notably sincere about it). In Andoria's cities and villages, every street is decked in imperial regalia, and the Andorian fleet is one of the deadliest tools in the Emperor's war machine. After a resistant new alien world tastes the chaotic fury of the Axanari forward attack, the disciplined waves of death that follow frequently do so at the hands of Andorian warriors. The Emperor values the passionate aliens, masters of the art of combat in love with their role in the empire's growth.

It was not always so. The Andorians of centuries past vainly named themselves the Star Empire, a military state forged centuries before they had even achieved space travel. All

that is Andorian was built in the name of Krotus, their legendary conqueror, who brought all the disparate cultures of the frozen world under his iron rule sometime in the 13th century.

Determined to carry the legacy of Krotus to the stars, the Andorians built a dozen thriving colonies, and enslaved the primitive natives of nearby Menk II, before encountering humanity in 2137. The resulting war, fueled by Andorian certainty that they were destined to rule the galaxy, was a costly exercise for the Emperor, as the powerful Andorian ships repelled wave after wave of imperial assault. Ultimately, the Andorians were simply out-numbered and short on the resources necessary for extended warfare, and they found themselves in a humiliating war of attrition. Worn down to nothing, the proud blue warriors admitted defeat, their morale crushed and their cities starving.

For decades, the Andorians were grudgingly servile, but a younger generation fanned the embers of the spirit nearly extinguished by the war. In 2186, during a time of imperial instability, the Endilev clan led a bloody uprising in a desperate bid for Andorian independence. Striking coup after coup using little more than scavenged ships, antique weapons and the clan's signature form of drunken-style hand fighting, their early success was shocking. In the end, however, they were still no match for the empire. An imperial warlord rallied the forces needed to do the job, and their utter defeat at his hands was turned into an instrument in his own bid for the throne.

What developed next surprised even the new Emperor. The Andorians couldn't survive the shame of a second crushing defeat, so they refused to indulge in shame at all. A religious and philosophical renaissance resulted in the fusion of the popular Terionist religion with the teachings of the latter-day prophetess Umarin. The new faith made loyal citizens of the Andorians, who, *en masse* and over the course of only a few years, embraced the belief that the human Emperor was the reincarnated embodiment of Krotus. They repented, feeling that they had been foolish to deny their destiny by fighting the ruler that they should have been serving all along!

The Emperor, amused, put this new development to use when dealing with the newly-discovered Klingon Empire in 2194. Offering the Klingons the role of favored slaves and guards galled the proud Andorians seriously. When it became necessary to extinguish the Klingons once and for all, the Andorians were the most eagerly aggressive attackers, swearing their lives to Starfleet for the first time in history, and slaughtering fourteen Klingons for every Andorian lost. They were determined that *they* would be the favored warriors, not the upstart Klingons! The Emperor, smart enough to reward and cultivate Andorian passion, but hardly willing to keep them literally at his side, elevated Andoria to vassal status. There they serve still, confident in the knowledge that they are the instruments of their ancient conqueror.

# Distant Ports Call:

## The Mercantile Series

The word "adventure" comes to us from maritime tradition. Long before it meant a kind of story, *adventure* meant "speculative" trading, where a ship's master would buy cargo on sight in one port, hoping to find a buyer in another. It was an act of faith, a risk that could spell poverty as easily as it could produce riches.

Free from the burden of pre-arranged transaction, a cargo ship specializing in "adventure cargo" was a ship that went where her captain pleased, profiting or failing on the wits and savvy of her crew. Many such vessels routinely sailed waters that no "civilized" ship ever saw. The crews of these vessels walked on shores that men back home had scarcely heard of. Then, as now, *adventure* meant going where no one had gone before.

This chapter is about the romance, danger and excitement found in the *original* kind of adventure (and related mercantile stories, from colonial supply-runs to the lives of Romulan arms dealers). In the tradelanes and in the backwaters, a small crew and a sturdy vessel can stride between the lines that bind the rest of the galaxy. Merchants have *freedom*, and with that, there comes a unique set of dangers, and sometimes a high cost that has nothing to do with the purity of the latinum in the hold.

So far, this book has examined cargoes, ships, deals, and merchant life from the practical side of things — the nuts-and-bolts concerns that form the foundation of a good merchant series. Here, we'll examine those things again from the *dramatic* perspective, examining the conflicts, choices, adventures and misadventures that merchants in the *Star Trek* universe can experience.

### Bed and Bulkhead: The Ship

A "merchant" ship is any ship that carries cargo for delivery or sale. Politics, wars, and borders being what they are, this means that a lot of ships serving under merchants *now* have quite a lot of "then" under the hull.

Beyond the warm confines of the major interstellar governments lie the thousands of independent star-systems, growing and fighting, largely unconcerned with the greater galaxy around them. Once they make the jump to FTL-capability, they build ships meant to explore, ships meant to carry colonists, ships meant to blast the living daylights out of the creepy-looking neighbors they've just met. But times quickly change, and starships aren't cheap, and maybe half of the merchant vessels out there are *those* ships, re-purposed for trade.

Merchant ships, by genre tradition as much as "realistic" tradition, are ships with character, with a life of their own, with quirks, with surprises inside. As the Narrator of a mercantile campaign, you should regard your Crew's vessel as the most important member of the Supporting Cast, and as with any major character, it deserves a history.

- ***Who Built It?*** — Is it a former warship, stripped of its now-obsolete weapons systems, with berths gutted to expand the hold? Is it an old "sleeper" ship, slow and silent, sold and traded through the hands of six neighboring cultures until finally reaching its current role? Was it built as a super-modern freighter, perhaps, but a hundred years ago? What language are the signs on the doors in? What quirks of ship design did the builders have? Did they have any particular weaknesses or even special talents? Does it require special jury-rigs to dock with the local facilities? Can it land on a planet? Can it go safely down into an ocean?
- ***Where Has It Been?*** — If the Crew aren't among the first to own or serve aboard their ship, take a minute to give it a lineage. Perhaps it once served steadily on a supply run through the inner reaches of Romulan space, bringing mail and luxury items to Romulan colonists. After being sold at auction, it passed into the hands of the Cardassians, who armored the hold and used it to transport troops to annexed worlds for a couple of years before ditching it for dead after it sustained damage. Taken in for salvage, it was repaired by some Ferengi, who sold it for double what they thought it was worth to a Centauran spice merchant, and so on. Each hand a ship passes through will mark it in some way, in the form of personal modifications, damage, added technology. Perhaps there are dangerous people who might *recognize* the vessel if it strays back into their space? Perhaps those people might not enjoy the memories thus inspired? A vessel's history is a trove of riches to plunder for stories.
- ***What Secrets Does It Carry?*** — It's a worthwhile dramatic tradition to learn more about a ship throughout the story, as with any character. Secrets and quirks are revealed at points that accelerate the plot, serving both the Narrator's immediate needs and the long-term goal of making the vessel seem more real. Some of those secrets are beneficial: the forgotten stash of weapons in a hidden compartment, the ancient dataplates containing charts leading to a forgotten system, the dusty green button on the flight controls that nobody wanted to touch until the situation got *desperate* enough that nobody cared anymore ("How about that? We're cloaked!"). Some of the secrets are less so: the stash of hidden weapons that bind themselves to their users, the result of a dead race's last great military experiment; the ancient dataplates leading to a system that was erased from the records for a *good reason,* the surprise cloaking device that shunts the vessel out of phase with the universe, slowly pulling the ship into a deadly alternate reality!

Of course, even a top-of-the-line cargo vessel, fresh from the shipyards and filled with that new-ship smell, can have a "history" and secrets; they just tend toward a different character. Any undiscovered technology or hidden goods are certainly deliberately hidden, perhaps for the purposes of espionage. Most interstellar governments aren't above using a civilian vessel as a pawn in the spy game, after all.

## Landing Gear

In "civilized" space, most trade moves along established routes via bulk freighters, tankers and container-ships docking at starports and moving hundreds or thousands of tons of cargo through any given port in a day. Such massive vessels — the backbone of any established interstellar community, are bound to space: For practical design reasons, they cannot enter an atmosphere or land on a planet's surface, nor do they need to. "Civilized

worlds," pretty much by definition, have orbital facilities where large ships can dock, with cargo moved by shuttle, beanstalk, or other contrivance to the surface below.

The decision to give the Crew's vessel *landing gear* can be one of the most important ones made before a series begins, in both practical and dramatic terms. Landing gear can provide a smaller, independent ship with an edge: It can go to new colony worlds where orbital facilities aren't yet practical, to primitive (perhaps even forbidden) worlds with no space-travel at all, to parts of *civilized* worlds where the "legitimate" cargo shuttles won't carry the goods. Landing gear both expands the possibilities of the series and puts an extra dose of power in the hands of the Crew, since they can take their ship with them almost anywhere. The Narrator should carefully consider the implications in light of the stories he has in mind.

### *Crew, Scope and Scale*

Beyond the issues of lineage is one of scale. On the largest of the commercial bulk freighters, the crews can number in the hundreds, ranging from freight-handlers to cultural specialists, engineers to economists, bonded security troops to the medical staff. While any cargo ship typically requires fewer hands on board than similarly sized ships used for other functions, the necessary "support crew" on a large vessel can still be dizzying. Such ships are full-bore spaceborne communities, where nobody (except perhaps the Captain) is expected to know everybody by name.

At the opposite end of the scale, a tiny "tramp freighter" can sport a crew so small that every soul aboard is a Player Character. Starports throughout the galaxy see traffic from thousands of "cargo vessels" that are little more than deep-space runabouts, sometimes even owned and operated by a single (often eccentric) merchant. These lone-wolf traders tend to specialize in cargoes small enough and rare enough (or illegal enough) that they can earn a living selling items that fit in a compartment only a couple of meters on a side.

Should the Crew's vessel be large or small? Here, the relationship is an inverse one between civilized sterility and "seat of the pants" desperation, but it presents anything but a clear-cut decision for the Narrator. On a tiny ship, the Crew have more absolute control over their vessel and their destiny (which players often love), and much less in the way of technological resources and technobabble "outs" to fall back on (which Narrators can definitely appreciate). It simply feels more adventurous. However, the advantages of a large NPC crew are many! By having a "built in" Supporting Cast, the Narrator gains a rich stock of potential romantic subplots, treacherous conspirators, ship-based storylines, and (never to be overlooked) nameless "extras" who can fall screaming to the deck to demonstrate the power of the alien energy weapon.

Finally, in this case, function follows form. Civilized vessels tend to fly in civilized space; smaller, older, and more "personal" ships carry cargo to worlds beyond the hubbub of settled systems, to independent alien worlds, to distant colonies. To determine the age and size of the Crew's vessel is to decide the space it will likely travel in.

No path is the "right" one except to carefully consider the kinds of stories you want to do, and the tastes of your players. When in doubt, ask them!

## Armed & Dangerous

Another decision with dramatic impact on the nature of a merchant series is: Is the Crew's vessel armed?

The reason for arming a trader is obvious: Space is dangerous, full of things that become less of a danger when shot. The reasons for not arming a trader, though, while not always as obvious, are just as compelling to some:

***Weapons Invite Trouble:*** Most merchant vessels are "civilian" ships. If they have guns at all, they are likely to be weak when compared to the state-of-the-art hardware sported by any military vessels the ship might encounter. This means that any ship-to-ship conflict is likely to be a "bringing a knife to a gunfight" situation for the Crew, and it's very often safer to be unarmed, instead. Even the bloodthirstiest of space-pirates seldom fire on an unarmed trader; they just take what they want and leave, instead.

- ***Weapons Make People Nervous:*** Traders deal, every day, with issues of trust. Vessels that hire their services, in particular, find that many "legitimate" customers shy away from any vessel that might conceivably be mistaken for a pirate or privateer ship. Furthermore, customers who want *only* the services of an armed trading vessel are often more trouble than they could possibly be worth!
- ***Weapons Limit Markets:*** Many starports forbid armed vessels entirely; just as many others allow armed traders only in distant orbital or satellite facilities, far from the bustle (and profits) to be found in the primary downports. In some cases, a ship's Captain can negotiate passage into a no-guns port by deactivating the weapons systems entirely (sometimes providing a transmission code that planetary security can use to *remotely* shut them down), but even so, such traders will be eyed with suspicion.

When designing the vessel your Crew will be using, keep in mind the personalities of your players along with the factors listed here. Some simply feel naked without at least "a fighting chance" against an armed opponent in space; others prefer to defend themselves with diplomacy, or at least creative use of available resources, and reap the tangible benefits of flying without weapons aboard.

## Conflicts and Themes

While nearly any kind of story can be told in the "space merchant" subgenre, some are especially suited to it. Here we'll detail a big handful of stories and story-building elements. The harried Narrator will find that thumbing through what follows can provide a spark of inspiration when the fires of the campaign need a good stoking.

### *The Art of the Deal*

On Dorlax V, the money is printed on small circles of dried animal skins. On Dorlax IV, the only currency recognized is the Druvarican Reto, a tiny sphere of irradiated platinum. Just three sectors away is the Federation border, so most people recognize the Federation credit . . . *if* the spender is a Starfleet officer on shore leave. The merchant isn't.

Where the currencies of the Federation, the Klingons, the Romulans and other interstellar governments begin to lose meaning, stories begin. Players love to haggle, to feel the triumph of creating an "everybody profits" situation out of chaos. Failing that, they're usually satisfied with a "Crew profits" situation . . .

The Druvaricans have a taste for the rich confections made by the natives of Dorlax V, who in turn need Druvarican tools. But since there isn't enough trade volume in either to justify a regular trade route, it's an excellent opportunity for the independent trader. But what if the Druvaricans are superstitious about outsiders? What if the delicate candies are so corrosive they burn through to the cargo deck? And no matter how you slice it, the Crew ends up with a profit measured in tools or candies. How can they turn that into much-needed fuel and repairs? Maybe the answer is bringing yet more worlds into the web of trade, until a reasonable route can be hammered out that makes everybody happy and the Crew solvent!

Alien societies have alien barriers to trade, and it's fun to shove your Crew right into the middle of it. Things like this can be amusing enough to build entire episodes on, though they usually work better as an episode's "B story" subplot.

### *Stuck in the Middle*

Sometimes, an innocent civilian vessel is just in the wrong place at the wrong time. If the Crew are forced to defend themselves or their cargo, they could be marked as a military target, with no-one on either side of the conflict to claim them, and both sides eager to see them out of the way. Or perhaps they're too close to a world under attack, and receive a distress signal — do they respond? Go for help? Try to mount a rescue on their own? Avoiding taking sides is essential to survival, but sometimes it can't be helped without compromising things more vital than the safety of the ship.

"Stuck in the Middle" stories are those that explore the kinds of responsibilities and temptations that come from having an independent starship. Most people in the Galaxy *don't*, after all, and on many worlds distant from the major trade arteries, the sight of a spacegoing vessel is a real occasion. When that occasion coincides with trouble, the Crew can find themselves blamed, hated, or looked upon as the only hope for salvation.

### *Trouble in the Hold*

A merchant is no better than his goods, so the dramas of the tradelanes are very often tales spun from the stuff of trade itself — the stuff packing the crates and weighing down pallets in the hold.

Some cargoes are obviously hazardous or difficult to deal with. Livestock (or animals destined for a new interstellar zoological exhibit!) can be unruly, destructive and messy. Compounds used for energy-production or industrial purposes can be volatile or radioactive, and so on. Stories about the danger and temptation of dangerous cargo are staples of the genre, and can practically tell themselves, making them ideal for "pick-up" games or sessions where the Narrator has minimal preparation time.

Of course, perhaps even better are cargoes that aren't obviously hazardous, a distressingly realistic possibility when dealing with the very alien. The Crew has heard through the

trader's grapevine that the settlers on Mirinarr will give just about anything for Vota crystals, essential to their religion — but the Mirinarri failed to mention that the Vota crystals, while they look like harmless chunks of blue quartz, have properties that stimulate psionic potential in many humanoids. What happens when the Crew is carrying fourteen metric tons of them?

A related story-type is the troublesome *passenger* story (see sidebar).

## Passengers

Most cargo vessels have a spare stateroom or two. Often, they're cramped and Spartan, but they are a good source of additional revenue. While in port, travelers frequently book passage in them, seeking transport to the next world on the trader's itinerary. Sometimes such passengers pay in money or goods; sometimes they negotiate to *work* for passage, becoming temporary employees of the ship.

Cargo-vessel passengers almost always have a story to tell. Most would rather be on a passenger liner, with a nice bunk and entertainment facilities and eager stewards to wait on them. "Tramp" traveling is cheaper, though, and sometimes the only thing available for months in the remote galactic backwaters. Such characters can provide a regular cast of "Guest Star" NPCs, giving the Crew somebody new to talk to every week, even if their vessel is a tiny one.

Passengers can springboard subplots, or entire episodes. Some people travel this way because they're trying to keep a low profile, staying just ahead of the law, or a criminal syndicate, or other pursuer. Some have desperate tasks to complete, personal quests that might inspire the Crew to help them out, or join them. Others are dangerously unstable or outright evil, determined to accomplish a goal that the Crew will have every reason to fight against.

And of course, they're all strangers, at first. The Narrator should never let the Crew be too sure about any passenger; it can be fun to keep them guessing. Strange alien customs and living habits can breed suspicion even in a well-meaning Crew, and the most devious of criminals may seem likeable, helpful and harmless.

### *Breaking the Law*

Most merchants, when asked to smuggle something into a politically "hot" area of space, or to spy, flatly refuse. To accept is to abuse the privilege of being a trader, and when it all hits the fan, nobody is going to stick up for the life of a merchant (even a well-meaning and patriotic one) except the merchant. But what happens when the smuggling will save thousands of lives? Or when the spying could preserve worlds that the merchant is fond of trading on? Most merchants care about more than just business, and when that line is crossed, it can make for an exciting adventure!

It's a matter of personal taste how "rogueish" the Series will feel. Some players will be eager to pursue a life of profit-at-all-costs; others will prefer more heroic stories. Episodes in which the laws and traditions that govern the tradelanes become a potential hurdle can

challenge the players in fascinating ways, and can split the Crew down the middle along ethical lines.

Provided your players are mature enough to handle the challenges, this can be a great way to spend an evening playing *Star Trek,* and might even send the Series in entirely new directions. Sometimes, after a series of more "episodic" adventures dealing with the trials and adventures of legitimate trade, a "second season" with a more seat-of-the-pants feel to it can be an interesting change. Illegal activity, from heroic support of an embargoed world to the chance and danger of high-stakes smuggling, can provide an excellent core for a long-term story arc.

### *The Merchant as Explorer*

Profits within established markets — even the "established" tradelanes that run beyond the rim of settled interstellar governments — are limited. The limits can be stretched and creatively minimized, of course, and most merchants do just fine by working existing ports. Some brave traders, though, take on the greater risk of forging entirely new trade alliances, of exploring the depths of space for new worlds to trade with, new ports where the likes of the trader has yet to be seen.

If independent merchants tend to walk outside the bounds of civilization, merchant-traders tend to walk outside the bounds even of *merchant* society. They are a special breed. Some are, through ignorance, inaction or greed, responsible for wars, for the corruption of young cultures, or for the destruction of millions. Unprepared for the complex series of life-or-death decisions that can arise when meeting an entirely new alien species, those not fit to walk this particular path often meet messy ends, and take many with them. The exceptions, though, those innovative, savvy explorers with the will, wit and caution to make it work, become legends. Many have laid the groundwork that others build on to make new nations and alliances. They make things better for everybody — and often get stinking rich in the process.

### *Other People's Battles*

The traditional star trader is apolitical. He doesn't care if the Klingons and the Cardassians are trading fire this year, so long as the Cardassian blockade doesn't prevent him from reaching port, or roving Klingons don't vent steam by reducing his ship to its component molecules. War can be profitable, as can slavery, medical emergencies, disasters, and any number of other unpleasant realities of the galaxy. And since embattled societies need food, weapons, medicine and other goods even more desperately than peaceful ones, merchants are often given special latitude. Traders can cross borders that Klingon or Starfleet vessels can only hover watchfully near; they can visit worlds where no others are welcome.

Some merchants are greedy opportunists, milking misery for all it's worth, demanding unfair prices for common goods because they know their customers have little choice. Others are truly heroic, taking less than a fair fee — or none at all — in exchange for the satisfaction of bringing relief to a suffering people. Most just carry the cargo and quote their price, unmoved by anything but the bottom line.

This facet of the merchant life is a potential feast of meaty conflict and tension; the latitude granted to merchants is a double-edged sword, and carries with it an undercurrent of grudging tolerance colored by mistrust. Stories exploring the merchant's role between the lines of others' conflicts are typically moral adventures, where a trader's own sense of security is pitted against his sense of justice, his love for his homeworld, or his desire to be something greater than he is.

### *Unwitting Pawns*

Merchant vessels can sometimes be tricked into being smugglers, spies, blockade-runners and more, by those commissioning the ship's services for apparently innocent cargo runs. By the time the Crew discovers what's really in the hold (or what's really going on at their destination, etc), it's too late, and they have to go with the flow, come out on top, and (most likely) head back to the guy who hired them to teach him a lesson. This can be fun, but tread carefully with it; use it too often and your players will resent it. Use it just *right* and it gives the Crew a great opportunity to show their stuff. It works best when the Crew gain control of the story fairly early on, and can turn the situation in several directions from there. If they can fix it so they can complete their commissioned haul in such a way that sticks it to the party that tried to deceive them, so much the better.

## Foils and Competitors

Every *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* series needs a supporting cast; recurring characters make the setting come alive, provide handy mouthpieces for the Narrator in times of need, and can, over time, grow to be as interesting as the Crew themselves. When the player characters spend their lives traveling from port to port in search of an honest credit, though, the supporting cast is likely to be dominated by other characters whose lives are just as unsettled . . . And as long as we're resigned to that anyway, we might as well use it as an excuse to make the lives of the Crew more difficult!

Competition is the force that drives excellence in any venture — every trader knows it. So, the foils and "villains" of a merchant series should be more than just obstacles. They should be worthy sparring partners, the kinds of characters that can relate to the Crew with mutual respect while daggers are sharpened and phony smiles are affected! Out on the fringes, where the merchants live, not everybody gets along, and few would have it any other way . . .

### *Other Traders*

While it's true that merchants are a society (even a kind of brotherhood, depending who you ask), most of them spend a good deal of time trying to outdo one another. For some, it's a friendly game of counting coup that helps a trader keep his edge. For others, it's not friendly at all.

Foils of this kind are typically other crews and captains, working to exploit the trails already blazed by the Crew. Friendly competition from such sources includes bidding wars with ware-sellers in port, racing to meet a demand ahead of the Crew's own efforts, and trying to woo away regular clients (if the Crew are the kind of traders who hire their

services). Unfriendly competition can range from sneaky campaigns to smear the Crew's reputation to outright theft or espionage!

If you decide to give the Crew this kind of "personal" competition, spend some time creating an interesting set of motives for the NPCs. It's the easy way out to assume that profit alone could inspire such cut-and-thrust between two trading vessels. It's a big galaxy, and greed will be a common enough campaign theme, anyway. Maybe the competitors have larger goals — the manipulation of markets for political ends, for example. Or maybe the captains of the two vessels once fought for the affections of the same lover, or developed a rivalry when they served aboard the same ship (or maybe they're family! Brothers can take their rivalries to their graves).

A less personal, but no less common form of rivalry stems from the long-standing competition between the large interstellar trading guilds. Any of the tactics mentioned above — and many more — can be employed on a scale that can shake the foundations of the worlds unfortunate enough to unwittingly donate their starports as a playing field. The games the guilds play are large and devious, and while everybody works hard to make sure trade itself isn't harmed, cool heads don't always prevail, and sometimes a sort of "If I can't have it, nobody can" attitude rules the day, leaving the tradelanes in shambles and trading vessels without cargo!

### *The Authorities*

From tin-plated inspectors haunting every seedy starport to massive patrol ships bristling with armament and eager to make use of it, traders must deal regularly with the authorities, even if their operations are entirely ethical. Part of the reason is that, ethical or not, just about everything is illegal *somewhere*, a depressing fact of interstellar trade that merchants learn early on. While the best adventure-trade is to be found in the less organized galactic backwaters, a few months of petty dictators declaring cargoes as voluntary donations to their military causes, border patrol ships mugging for bribes, and deep-space rangers preaching about the danger of contaminating young cultures, some merchants are eager to ditch their ship and take a job as a steward on a Federation freight liner.

Unlike competing traders, who the Narrator should try to play as foils worthy of respect, authority figures are fair game for being utter jerks who do little but stand in the way. At least, that's *traditionally* their role in space merchant stories, *Star Trek* and otherwise. This has a lot to do with the central theme of the trader subgenre! Being a space merchant is all about flying to whatever star beckons, living as you please, making your own fortune, and pulling yourself up out of trouble by your bootstraps. Being pulled over for doing 66 in a 60, metaphorically or otherwise, simply isn't part of the appeal, so the cops get short shrift.

Of course, traditions are made to be retooled at the Narrator's whim. Authority figures are inconvenient to the freewheeling lifestyle of the tradelanes, but they're also a fact of life, and many of them really do mean well. After a patrol-ship saves the Crew's bacon from some pirates, they might find that they agree, and be willing to do a good turn for the patrolmen in the future. On the other hand, if the Crew's preferred mode of business is the illegal, the authorities are likely to be a kind of "stock antagonist" in the series, with plenty of reason.

The good thing about having an authority-figure be a friend to the Crew is that he still gets to be a foil. Borrow a page from the book of any good private-detective story to see what I mean. A good P.I. finds his cop friends to be very valuable contacts, sources of fact and rumor, and maybe even a good ally in the field, from time to time. But the relationship is double-edged, with the cop sometimes forced to take action against the hero when their motivations cross too sharply, when right and wrong and legal and illegal become unrelated, as they often do when things get complicated and lives are at stake. The potential for dramatic parallels in a merchant story are many.

***Pirates & Privateers***

No matter how irksome the authorities might seem, no matter how frustrating the efforts of the competitors, nobody feels anything but dread at the sight of a pirate vessel. This is true even if the Crew are *themselves* pirates. Pirates typically have plenty of military hardware, some of it even very modern, acquired from the black market and jury-rigged in a deadly assembly where all nations, at least symbolically via their guns, coexist in harmony! It isn't unusual to find a ship loaded with Federation photon torpedoes, Klingon disruptors, Romulan plasma devices and more, capable of unleashing hellfire in a chorus of the best of what the militaries of the galaxy have to offer — or at least their choicest leftovers. And while few pirate vessels stand a chance against a modern warship (or even a cruiser), they can typically reduce a civilian vessel to ribbons of molten plastic and a cloud of plasma with no trouble. Of course, they prefer to steal any valuables first, which is often the only window of opportunity for a ship to defend itself, or summon help.

Pirates & Privateers can share many things in common, and some use the terms interchangeably, but there are a vital differences. Pirates, strictly speaking, are simply a band of thieves with a ship. Pirates prey on weak targets in out-of-the-way locations. They're particularly a hazard whenever new trading opportunities show themselves in a recently-discovered system. Such a setup often insures a stream of merchant traffic without (just yet) the accompanying stream of organized law enforcement or military vessels. Pirates also lurk in emptier parts of space that merchants use as "shortcuts" between established tradelanes, for similar reasons. Pirates are seldom a threat in "civilized" space.

Privateers, on the other hand, are a special breed of opportunist. In the bygone days of sailing ships, privateering was "piracy with permission" — ships could be issued *letters of marque* by Nation A giving them permission to plunder the shipping of Nation B without being charged as criminals. So, a pirate ship could make an "honest" living, plundering for months and then returning to a safe civilian port to sell their goods, instead of being forced to trade on remote islands and live as hunted men. Clever privateers had letters of marque from just about everybody, so they could, if they were sufficiently devious, sail nearly anywhere and be welcomed! In contemporary merchant jargon, a "privateer" is any ship who profits from tension or war between two interstellar governments by means less than savory. They're the galactic equivalent of looters, profiting from misery and anger and very often (just like the old Earth privateers) getting away scot-free because one side or another likes seeing their enemies battered, even if it's by a third party. Privateers make excellent villains, capable of causing trouble for honest merchants by association alone.

# Exploration for the Narrator

The theme of ***To Boldly Go*** — exploration — is one of the most fundamental in *Star Trek,* and by far the most rewarding to experience "first hand" in the game. But assembling an exploration episode (or entire series) presents special challenges to the Narrator. In previous chapters, we've explored the nuts-and-bolts side of the worlds, stars, and aliens the Crew may discover. Here, we'll provide the *dramatic* tools necessary to assemble the rocks and water into planets that *live*. We'll look at the following:

- ***Breaking the Safety Net:*** Exploration stories put their heroes atop dizzying gulfs in high winds — sometimes literally. Your players should feel the vertigo of going where no one has gone! We explore some of the best ways to add a sense of isolation and danger to your stories without making the players feel cheated.
- ***Basic Needs and the Revelation Web:*** Returning to solid ground, we chase down the tracks of that most elusive creature: the exciting story. The hunt includes a method of generating ideas by examining the "basic needs" of sentient species, and fresh look at our traditional "tripartite" story form, refitting it for the task of exploring the unknown.
- ***Worlds as Characters:*** On the final frontier, there aren't quite as many NPCs . . . Or are there? Even when there are no new civilizations to meet, the worlds that your Crew will discover are characters unto themselves.

- ***Coming Home:*** Sometimes, discovering a new place is the end of the story. But sometimes, the explorers get to reap the special benefits — or deal with the unfortunate consequences — of what they've found.

**Why Run an Exploration Episode?**

Here's a rundown of the essential strengths of the exploration theme; it makes a handy "renewal of purpose" tool, and a useful adventure-design checklist:

- ***Exploration is Good Science-Fiction:*** Scientists, doctors, and scholars are given more changes to shine in an exploration episode than in any other kind — knowledge and the clever application of it is essential to survive the unknown. In addition, diplomacy, respect, and sympathy often take the center stage as functional dramatic elements. This is because new life ("new civilizations" or simply an alien ecology) is best encountered by those who exemplify all three, for practical as well as ethical reasons. Exploration stories, then, emphasize things that lie at the heart of science-fiction's appeal to many, demonstrating the value of knowledge and the strength of reasoned, rather than hostile, relations.
- ***Exploration Inspires Wonder:*** Villains and politics and trade-relations are all great fun, but there's something extraordinary about the opportunity to set foot on alien soil, to taste the breezes of another world. Most of us daydream about gazing across a valley tinted by the light of another sun, where beneath the moving shadows of alien clouds, life that no man has a name for thrives, skittering and climbing . . . On Television or at the movies, we enjoy this kind of experience vicariously, with costumed characters and matte paintings and special effects. In a roleplaying game, though, we're a step closer to experiencing it "firsthand"

unfiltered by a movie budget or the restrictions of a well-paced hour of TV. We can wander. We can look and see what's *over* that distant ridge. We can hike along that river, and chase down a distant animal's call.

- ***Exploration Engages the Players' Own Abilities:*** because exploration stories share so much in common with mystery tales, meeting the challenges they present is always a matter of much more than skill tests and combat resolution. New worlds present enigmas that must be unraveled by the players as much as by the Crew they portray, which can produce a greater sense of accomplishment for all concerned, making the whole experience more immersive and dramatic.
- ***Exploration is Exciting and Dangerous:*** And it can be deadly without a single "villain," which makes it a refreshing experience for many gamers. It can also have an epic, grand scope without necessarily threatening the entire Federation. Curiously, by emphasizing the drama and detail possible on a single, distant world, exploration stories can emphasize how truly small the Federation (and the Crew, and the Crew's vessel) really are, without diminishing them in any way. Rather, the renewed perspective makes the "larger than life" nature of *Star Trek* blossom entirely, since the Crew feel what it's like to be courageous trail-blazers all alone in the depths of space. The themes of isolation and self-reliance can feel more overtly heroic than plots set deep within "civilized" space, where the shifting tides of political relations and Starfleet regulations can render everything in more abstract tones. When exploring, the Crew can stretch their legs and face the danger on their own.

## Breaking the Safety Net

When the explorers of ancient Vulcan or Andoria set out across desert & mountain, their expeditions were journeys marked by steadily-increasing danger and isolation. Potential for discovery increases proportionately to risk; what is precious to the explorer is dangerous, remote, far from the security of home.

*Star Trek* introduces a contradiction to this classic theme — and fundamental truth — of the explorer's adventure. Under ideal circumstances, Starfleet officers needn't concern themselves with how much weight a train of mules can carry (don't forget food & water for the mules!), or how many layers of clothing they should bring, or whether or not they can rely on the simple maps provided for them by the old trackers who sometimes ventured this far across the mountains. In Starfleet, home travels with you: A starship provides warmth, security, food, clothing, detailed aerial-view maps and sensor scans, and communication. If a party beams down to the surface of a new planet, and hikes 29 kilometers, they aren't 29 kilometers further from their cabins. They aren't any further away *at all,* courtesy of the transporter beam.

We've dealt elsewhere with the universal difficulties introduced to a series by allowing too much reliance on technology. Most Narrators have no difficulty throwing in freakish upper-atmosphere ionization that prevents the transporter from working, or an unexpected malfunction that strands a shuttle, or a surprise distress call that pulls the starship into a nearby system on an emergency, leaving the Crew to fend for themselves until they can return. Such measures are appropriate, and even lots of fun when used judiciously, but when exploration becomes the primary focus of the series, they get old fast. The upper-atmosphere ionization seems somehow less freakish the fifth time around (moving it to the

*lower* atmosphere to shake up the players' expectations doesn't work; we checked). Likewise, the shuttle malfunction becomes very much *expected*, and the poor NPCs in desperate need of rescue are probably very depressed when their call for help is answered with monotone boredom. "Yes, we're on our way. Again."

So, the traditional anti-tech solutions aren't strong enough to break the safety net, but the safety net still needs breaking if you really want your Crew to feel like *explorers*. Furthermore, rendering the Crew's toys impotent every week spoils the fun of having toys to begin with! So, new Narration and story techniques must be devised. Here are a handful; use them as-is, and as springboards to inspire new ones:

### *Net-cutting 101: Be it Ever So Humble*

Aboard a *Galaxy*-class vessel or other major ship of the line, people can live with all the comforts of their homeworld, with holodeck simulations of any that are missing. If you're beginning your exploration series from the start (or if you're running a one-shot episode for a demo or a quick-fix night with the gang) consider assigning the Crew to a much humbler vessel. Depending on which year your series begins in, this can make a lot of sense. During the years of the Borg invasion, or the Dominion War (or the years immediately following them), Starfleet's emphasis turned toward sharply toward the defense of the Federation. By necessity, exploration is given short shrift during times of crisis, and the vessels assigned to seek out new life and new civilizations tend to be smaller and older. Also, Starfleet might expect, based on long-range surveys and other data, that the sectors the Crew have been assigned will contain nothing spectacular or dangerous — perhaps just some mineral-rich worlds, or an interesting nebula. Of course, Starfleet will be *wrong* — but their choice of assigned vessels will reflect their underestimation of the adventure awaiting the Crew.

This approach has one very strong advantage to recommend it: It lowers the bar on technological expectations right out of the starting gate. The characters are still Starfleet, and have many of the associated advantages (the sensors will be as modern as the ship can carry, for example), but they don't live on the lap of luxury that is an entirely modern vessel. Holodecks are probably out of the question; armament will be limited; shuttles will be few. Give the ship a few glitches and quirks and you can establish an atmosphere of being aboard a ship far *from* home, rather than being on a ship that's every bit as nice *as* home. With that atmosphere in place, the players won't feel cheated when their security blankets are yanked from them, since they were thin and ratty blankets to begin with.

### *Net-Cutting 102: Pull the Rug Out!*

"Adventures," said American explorer Herbert Spencer Dickey, "are a sign of inefficiency." "Good explorers don't have them." Adventure, in one sense, is what happens when a simple journey becomes a complicated and unpleasant one. What Dickey meant is that good explorers do everything they can to avoid adventure. They plan. They manage their resources.

But as any experienced explorer can tell you, adventures still happen. In Dickey's day, explorers wandered the Earth, and the Earth, for all it's amazing variety, has several constants that can be relied on. That stuff flowing in the rivers might not be potable, but it

*is* water. That snake might be dangerous, but it won't be able to follow me across this gorge. The edges of the leaves are curling up? That means it'll probably be raining, soon.

So, Dickey and his colleagues had thousands of years of Earth's own experiences with itself to fall back on. Compared to the explorers of the United Federation of Planets, they were boy scouts wandering marked trails in a national park, because the depths of the unknown galaxy have a way of producing dangerous exceptions to *every* rule. Your players get to discover them — the hard way. Rather than attacking the comforting presence of their tricorder and phaser, attack the comforting presence of their *fundamental assumptions.*

This kind of "attack" can take many forms. Animals that seem familiar can have dangerous differences. Actions that are normally safe, or even routine, can have disastrous consequences. Turning this on its ear, things that seem deadly or impossible might be the only paths to safety, introducing a cousin of another classic *Star Trek* theme: overcoming prejudice! In this case, though, the prejudices are about places and things, rather than people — an appropriate twist for a genre where places *are* characters.

### *Net-cutting 103: Gradual Erosion*

Whether you're busy breaking their equipment or undermining their faith in the laws of physics, it can be much more dramatic if you build the effect gradually, dealing a series of blows to the comfort of the expedition as they approach the serious challenges near the story's climax.

Imagine again the ancient expeditions of planet-bound explorers. At the beginning, things are cheery. There are photographers and banquets, newsreels and interviews. The sponsoring university is full of praise and hearty handshakes, the mules or camels or *zabathu* are fresh and well-watered and obedient. The supplies are neatly packed, the maps are crisp. There is nothing but optimism.

On the first leg of the journey, the problems are minor enough that the explorers can laugh them off. The party is beyond home, but still at the edges of civilization. The local villages are foreign and primitive, but the natives are friendly; they recognize the explorers and seldom shoot at them. One of the mounts got sick and some of the men had an allergy to the preserved fruit rations, but it's still a jolly adventure, with songs around the fire and the beginnings of serious talk of scholarly awards and lucrative publishing deals.

*"It has been seven weeks,"* the journal begins, *"since we have seen a familiar face. The mountain air is humid and difficult to breathe, and we had to abandon the rest of the pack animals last night. We'd lost four to disease, and six to broken legs. Half of the men are sick, too, and the two native guides have abandoned us, taking the lamps and Carlisle's pocket watch. We'd have plenty of extra food, now, if only we had a way to carry it over that ridge. Spirits low."*

A month later, when the explorers finally find the coastline, or the hidden valley with the ancient city, or the new species of bird, they're half-mad and exhausted. They're so sick of dried food that they smack their lips in anticipation at the sight of a few rubbery native tubers seasoned with a powder that Carlisle is convinced was originally brought along for

cleaning the rifles. But then, the *real* adventure is ready to begin, and the explorers must face it exhausted, with resources limited, like heroes.

For the *Star Trek* Narrator, the game becomes a rousing bout of Find the Metaphor. Maybe the native guides who abandon the expedition are still native guides — or maybe they're ancient computers, a fragmentary clue leading to an ancient alien world. The ship's own computer was able to read their memory banks after a bit of effort, and everything was going fine until the alien computers *crashed* — sucking up massive system resources in the process, and damaging the basic profile database used by the ship's sensors! "Running off with a pocket watch," indeed!

## Basic Needs: An Idea-Generation Technique

Threats to basic needs — needs like safety, health, and freedom — are fundamental motivators in many kinds of adventure story. It's an axiom held by many writers of fiction that the heart of a drama is found by examining who is hurt worst by the story — and being "hurt," broadly defined, means having one or more basic needs violated or denied. Since isolation from comfort is so integral to exploration stories (see p.XX), this means a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Narrator can keep himself well-stocked in fresh adventure ideas simply by looking at basic human (and alien!) needs, and examining how the needs of the Crew (and of innocent civilians that they may be protecting) are threatened by the new world you've created. Whenever you need a new adventure idea, come here, pick a need, decide on the source of the threat to it, and see what bubbles to the surface . . .

From the ancient Greeks to Maslow and Max-Neef, scholars and scientists have spent a lot of effort trying to narrow down exactly what our basic needs *are*. Borrowing from all of them, and expanding the definitions to include alien "people" as well as humans, we've assembled a list of five major categories that answers to our own specific need for good *Star Trek: The Next Generation* stories!

### The Source of the Threat

By examining the five categories of "basic needs," we can define a lot of threats. Another important variable is where the threat comes from. A few common ones:

- **Funky Energies:** Whether it's something funny in the magnetosphere, or the emissions of an unpleasant ancient device, this is a useful catch-all. The threat can often be remedied, partially or entirely, by proper shielding, but sometimes the initial "attacks" are deadly and invisible.
- **Native Life:** Sometimes this means hostile (or even well-meaning but still-dangerous) sentient locals, but plants, animals, and life that doesn't fit convenient categories can all be threatening. And sometimes it's entirely accidental!
- **Weather and Other Local Phenomena:** Storms, volcanic activity, vast, murky swamps, and other perfectly ordinary (or entirely extraordinary) cycles and features of nature can be the source of a threat. Or turn this on its ear by making these things the "victim" being threatened!
- **Environmental Contaminants:** These can be found in air, water, or any other fluid medium the Crew might find themselves in. Sometimes Starfleet filtration technology can deal with it, sometimes it can't even be detected.

- **Outside Influences:** Sometimes, the threat from (or to) a new world is from beyond it — aliens exploiting a planet's resources, enslaving its people, or even demanding worship as Gods! Or the outside influence can be less "villainous" and more natural — a sun going nova, an interstellar phenomenon passing to closely, and so on.
- **The Crew (Outside Influences II):** Sometimes, simply setting foot on new soil can cause subtle chain reactions that can be horribly destructive. A staple idea of time-travel fiction (where simply buying the last newspaper on sale to find out what year it is deprives a famous dead writer of *his* copy, so he's never inspired to write an essay that prevented a war, and so on . . .) this theme can also be used to generate trouble strictly in the present tense. Sometimes, the "innocent civilians" that the Crew must protect are the world's *natives*, and the threat is the Crew itself.

### *Sustenance & Environment*

A catch-all for fundamental physiological needs. People need food, water (or some analogue of it), and a favorable temperature, gravity and atmosphere to stay alive. Arguably the most basic of all needs, since a lack of these renders all others moot. Airless and lifeless worlds challenge the need for sustenance & environment very directly, as do worlds with poisonous atmospheres, inedible food, and impotable water.

Despite this need's simplicity, there's plenty of room for more esoteric threats along these lines. Picking "native life" arbitrarily from the threat-source list (see sidebar), and deciding that "food" is the specific need threatened, we could determine that a local animal gets into the Crew's ship and begins devouring the raw matter used to replicate food supplies. Alternately, the presence of the *Crew* is the threat — something about psychic emanations from humans is killing a small animal that's vital to the planet's own food chain! Even when we divide all the categories and sources into their component cells, there are still thousands of possibilities for each.

### *Rest & Shelter*

"Shelter" (including clothing!) becomes more essential as a species grows to depend on controlled environments. A primitive nomad will find the lack of a tent or cave to sleep in a minor, perhaps irritating, inconvenience, and may have feet so toughened by barefoot travel that he'd find the very idea of shoes to be silly and needlessly restricting. 20th Century Americans and Europeans, on the other hand, are very used to a roof, shoes, and even climate control, so it stands to reason that the ordinary citizens of the 24th Century Federation would find a lack of shelter even more traumatic than we would. Starfleet Officers are trained to survive and won't have much trouble, but this need should always be kept in mind when "civilian" NPC colonists and scientists are present. Furthermore, the need for times of rest can be challenged on all sides, trained officers and flatfooted civilian alike, by any number of environmental challenges.

### *Health & Security*

By far the most commonly-threatened family of needs in adventure games, the potential here is obvious! The Narrator can have a lot of fun exploring the many ways in which health & security can be threatened, from subtle alien diseases to unexpectedly combustible atmospheres.

### *Friends & Family*

Like shelter, the need for companionship may vary a lot from species to species. But, considering how very important it is to humans, an entirely antisocial being would be truly alien, and would more likely be a single-story plot device than an ongoing PC or NPC presence. Certainly, most of the Federation's citizens, regardless of species, need friendship, love, respect and community in some form and to some degree. Narrators must be crafty to threaten this one in a game, since the very nature of RPGs is social: It's hard to make your players feel the loneliness and isolation of their characters while they're busy scarfing pretzels with a tableful of friends. But, steering into more complicated waters, there are many ways to threaten the fabric of an expedition's sense of trust and community. The moral questions raised by new discoveries can turn allies suddenly against one another, and breakdowns in communication caused by nature or alien influence (even well-meaning or accidental alien influence!) can be a terrifying blow to the basic need for contact and communication. This is the kind of challenge that's strong enough to carry an entire episode, since working hard to maintain community is one of the noblest ideals of *Star Trek*.

### *Leisure & Pleasure*

Once a sentient being is secure in his basic physiological and psychological requirements, his need becomes more personal, but no less powerfully felt: the need to enjoy existence. Rather than consuming food strictly as fuel, the luxury of preference allows food to become a source of fun. Procreation develops the potential for erotic pleasure. Learning and sharing what you've learned becomes a pastime, instead of just another method of survival, and communication opens up the potential for creative *expression*. Those who must spend all their available energy fulfilling the more basic needs may regard this latter category dismissively as "luxury" rather than a need, but in reality, the truth of our genuine need for these things is the basis of civilization and culture, an therefore of advancement beyond subsistence and onto the galactic stage. And because this need is more personally-defined than the others, stories about how it can be threatened are more dramatic and potentially mature than stories about threatening the Crew's wound levels!

By categorizing & examining needs in this way, we create a palette of colors with which to paint our adventures, and a tool for examining characters' behavior. Not only can we generate story ideas by asking "how can we threaten these needs?" and "Which of these needs haven't I tried threatening yet?" we can do so by coming up with new ways to *satisfy* them, too. After all, the best *Star Trek* exploration stories are stories of new and unusual threats undertaken to achieve new and unusual *reward*.

## Sense of Place

A game has a "sense of place" if the locations in it feel real, if the players can easily get the sense that beyond every door, down every avenue, is something new to experience. A game with a sense of place contains a convincing illusion of a complete galaxy, not just a series of disposable sets and stock backdrops.

The skills necessary to achieve this illusion are useful to the Narrator of *any Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode, but in an exploration series, where setting is the focus of nearly

every tale, they become the foundation of the Narrator's art. Here are a few simple rules to live by:

- ***Simplify Descriptions:*** Less is very definitely more, where descriptions are concerned. Don't describe the alien ichor as "slick and viscous, with a deep azure hue and a dark, glossy appearance" when "like dark blue motor oil" will do. Your players already have a vast mental library of textures, temperatures, colors, sensations, and experiences. Tap into what they can already imagine vividly, and your descriptions will become leaner and more inspiring (you'll also have more time to add relevant details, if needed, without bogging down play).
- ***The Body Responds:*** . . . to low branches (by ducking), to bright sun (by wincing and shielding the eyes), to deadly cold (by shivering and keeping arms close). Give life to your locales by having your NPCs — and even your own Narration — include these kinds of simple "pantomimes." Besides, it's fun, and your players will often follow suit!
- ***Unexpected Sensations:*** Not only should you remember to hit all the senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) regularly, try playing havoc with your player's expectations to engage their imaginations! Everybody *expects* the Big Dead Animal to *smell* bad, but what if that smell is surprisingly appetizing to the Betazoids in the landing party? What if it's accompanied by an unexpected itching sensation? Even if these "clues" are harmless red herrings, they'll get the medical tricorders beeping and keep players on their toes, all the while awakening the senses in their imaginations.
- ***Interactive Nature:*** Games are more exciting when the players' actions and choices have in-game consequences of some kind. On the "plot" scale, this means that their important story-related actions will determine the episode's outcome. On the *descriptive* level, though, it means that the Narrator should pounce on every action the Crew takes an *opportunity* to make the game more exciting! If, for example, a player tries to open an ancient portal by firing his hand-phaser at it, a dull Narrator might simply reply "Nope. It doesn't open. What do you try now?" A more *inventive* Narrator will try something more like "The surface of the door seems to absorb the energy of your shot — the tiny inscriptions covering the surface race briefly with fluid shots of white light! — But the door remains closed, and cold to the touch." By rewarding any action — even "failed" action — with a detail or "special effect," you not only keep the game lively (players are more likely to want to keep *doing* stuff if actions have results), you'll make your locations feel more real. If a player picks up a rock to throw, have a tiny animal scurry for cover from under it. If a player jumps across a stream, let him know how soft and slippery the mud is beneath his feet, and so on. Don't drown the players in detailed narrative — but definitely reward action with *inter*action.

## The Revelation Web: An Alternate Plot Structure

In the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* roleplaying game, we introduced the basic tripartite plot; the flexible and functional "Three Act" story structure (p.XX of the TNG rulebook), defined by the "reactive" Act One, the "active" Act Two (complete with mid-point plot twist) and culminating in the Act Three resolution: climax and epilogue.

This structure is best suited to stories where immediate conflict builds and develops. It helps insure that the tension doesn't lag, and keeps things moving fast . . . in a straight line!

Exploration stories often share more in common with mysteries than with linear action-style stories, however, especially in an RPG. In order to feel like they're really *exploring*, players need to feel free to move in many directions, following leads and gathering clues, unconstrained by a linear series of events. In order for an episode to feel like an *adventure*, however, the constant-tension-build that the three-act structure is so good at maintaining must still be present, or the "story" might devolve into a travelogue, as the Crew pokes around from star to star or valley to valley.

Some degree of compromise is possible by separating the key plot elements from the setting being explored, mapping them out as a timed sequence that must be dealt with *as* the Crew explores. This works, but the exploration will feel secondary to the story, for the simple reason that it is.

A useful approach, then, is to avoid compromise entirely and rebuilt the tripartite story in the image of a mystery adventure — one where the puzzles and enigmas are those of alien worlds and untamed nature, rather than bloody murder weapons and creaky old manors.

Acts One and Three remain essentially unchanged, but shrink dramatically in proportion to the overall story. Act One is still mostly reactive: the Crew responds as the story's premise and initial driving goals are introduced, along with new NPCs (or the return of favorite old ones). A good action scene to get the blood pumping and the phasers warm is still often a good idea!

Act Three remains, basically, a static structure, the arena for the final conflict, where the Crew test their skills and ideals against the challenges of the day. In the aftermath, loose ends are tied (or left dangling as teasers for the sequel), and the outcome of many choices are explored, as always.

How the Crew gets from Act One to Act Three, however, takes on an entirely different character. In the traditional Act Two, the characters act directly toward the adventure's goal, dealing with the challenges (and plot twists) that pop up in response to their efforts. If it goes well, it barrels right into Act Three, and the fireworks can begin.

In a mystery, however, the path from I to III is a convoluted maze of clues and questions, and a specific mid-point plot twist is almost redundant. When dealing with the unknown, there tends to be as much "twist" as there is "plot," anyway!

To keep the pace brisk in this kind of story requires planning. Imagine Act II as a kind of web, a series of strands crossing one another in odd patterns. Each strand is a clue or other "logical" path the crew can follow to navigate the story. At some points where the strands touch, a scene or location exists. A very, very simple Act II might look like this

[DIAGRAM]

The Crew, in Act I, are assigned to explore a dense cluster of red stars in the Delta Risus system. After a few days of surveying, they've deduced that the cluster is unnaturally dense

. . . The stars, for the past several millennia, have been steadily converging. Computers estimate that, in another 17 years, the stars are due to contact one another, possibly in dangerous collisions! They also rescue an Orion trader, far from home, adrift in a short-range shuttlecraft and claiming not to remember the past several months. Curious . . .

While there is no sign of the Orion's original vessel, the wreckage of a small Andorian ship is nearby, sending out a feeble distress code. All hands aboard her are dead, and the ship was clearly shot to pieces by weapons commonly carried by Orion pirates. On board, the Crew finds sensor data on world's orbiting two of the converging suns, and the coordinates of . . . nothing (at least nothing on the charts in the navigation databases!) . . . Just a point in deep space, defined as a position relative to the converging stars!

Provided with enough reason to jump headlong into Act II, the Crew are free to explore. The available "points" along our simple web break down as follows:

***Point I: The Coppery Ruins of Axan Beta***

This is one of the two worlds the Andorians surveyed. It's a world of ancient metal cities, alien and uninhabited for centuries. Scans indicate many mineable resources, and a once-thriving industrial culture destroyed, apparently, by disease. Exploring the ruins reveals a dangerous animal attacker, an abandoned Andorian camp with more clues leading to the Convergence World (Point III), and some artifacts from Gatarr (Point II).

***Point II: Gatarr: C855 Gamma***

This is the second world that the Andorian computers have sensor data on. It's a swampy, M-Type planet with at least seven billion inhabitants, at a level of development comparable to Earth circa 1850 (early Tech Level Four). Blissfully unaware of the rest of the galaxy's troubles, the Gatarrians are strictly Prime Directive material. The Narrator can develop their culture in as much detail as he thinks the Crew might enjoy, but any exploration of Gatarr will need to be on the sly, unless the Captain decides that the artifacts on Axan Beta (Point I) prove that Gatarr has already been contacted and "corrupted" by the Andorians. And on that subject, there's a camp here, too, but definitely Orion, abandoned on a remote mountainside. There are signs of a struggle, a dead Orion, and a crystal disk of advanced alien design, buried nearby. The disk is etched with microscopic writing. See Points III and V.

***Point III: The Mystery Coordinates (Convergence Planet)***

The "nowhere" coordinate reveals a sunless world — a freely-drifting planet that has long since escaped whatever sun it may have once orbited. It slides quietly through the void, frozen and dark and essentially invisible unless you're very close or know exactly what to look for. Deep within it is a massive alien engine that will come to life when the converging suns join it in a pre-planned multi-body orbital clockwork that will put this planet right in the middle of the interlocking orbits of the "renegade" stars. Right now, it's nowhere important, but anyone who projects the world's path will discover where it will be *then*. Seventeen years from now, the massive collection of suns will become a super-powerful starship, of a kind, capable of nearly-transwarp speeds (crossing a galactic gulf in a matter of months would be feasible), and producing massive amounts of nearly-inexhaustible power. That any other worlds (like innocent Gatarr!) orbiting the

"component" stars will be stripped away and destroyed was apparently regarded by the world's masters as a trivial detail. Ruins deep in the ice indicate that this is but one of many such vessels being "built." And locked in a cylinder of light, the Crew find a crystal disk, much like the one at Point II. If they can retrieve it and combine it with the other one, they will reveal the coordinates of an ancient facility built on Gatarr's smallest moon . . . (point V).

***Point IV: The Orion Decides to Talk***

He won't be willing to initially (insisting that it's all a blank, and muttering in obscure Orion languages), but after being confronted with findings from points I, II or III, he might relent and give up the amnesia story. He will claim the "star engine" as an ancient family legacy, a legend that became a discovery, passed down to he and his brothers as an inheritance. The Andorians, he claims, were thieves and opportunists seeking to cash in on his family's secret. Both groups were obviously fighting, and destroyed one another. This scene can provide "feedback" pointers to any points of points I, II and III that the Crew missed, and can launch things directly into the third Act.

***Point V: The Crystal Disks***

If the crew have explored the camps on Axan Beta and the machinery on the convergence world, they might have two crystal disks that, overlaid and fed into the computer, might reveal the location of another ancient construct — a secret base on the smallest moon of Gatarr, a place where the star-engine's builders worked and studied and planned the mighty project, perhaps. The Orions, as it turned out, already knew about it — and there are several surviving there, complete with an armed vessel, hiding behind sensor-defying shielding and biding their time. If the Crew (literally) put the pieces together and find them, they can interrogate them for more info, enlist their aid, and so on as appropriate, making this scene a kind of "bonus" point on the web. If the Crew don't do any of this, then the Orions could become a dangerous wildcard as the Crew barrels into the third Act unaware of them.

. . . And so much for Act II. The Crew can then take action that leads to the climax — the struggle to save an innocent world from being a byproduct in a massive construction project thousands of years old. Such a delicate clockwork of gravitation is bound to be undoable with cleverly-applied resources, but who knows what defenses may be in place? And tampering with such mighty forces, even to undo the tampering of others, might have further consequences — yet another powerful recurring theme of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

This example is on the sketchy-and-simple side, but it demonstrates the flexibility of the "web" approach to structuring the middle of the story. Rather than a linear series of conflicts and revelations, the Crew are faced with a menu of choices that, in play, will feel much broader and more complicated than it really is.

Either in play (on the fly) or in pre-game preparation, this story could easily be expanded. The crystal disks, in particular, are a highly simplified MacGuffin — two halves of a treasure map, repurposed for the 24$^{th}$ Century. In a more developed version of the story, the disks could be replaced with non-physical clues, bits of information that seem

meaningless individually, but provide a valuable new path when combined and logically examined.

With this approach, the players enjoy the pacing benefits of a structured plots and the freedom of an entirely free-form run, both in sufficient measure that the "boundaries," such as they are, won't even show. The "paths" on the web don't really exist — they're an arbitrary organizing tool for the Narrator. In actual play, the Crew can (and probably will) spend some time checking out the other converging stars, exploring Gatarr and Axan Beta in greater detail, and have more than one important dialogue with the surly Orion. But by preparing this "web" at the outset, the Narrator can maintain the action of the game by always having something meaningful and interesting waiting around the corner. Narrators with a gift for improvisation could develop the doomed planets on the fly; those with a penchant for detail could expand them into the "meat" for a full-blown series arc, driven by the conflicting motives of the Crew, the Orions, an Andorians that may seek out their now-missing brethren, and the innocent inhabitants of Gatarr. No matter how it's done, the improvised details will make sense, since the Narrator has drawn a simple "map" so he won't get lost in his own narrative — and the players won't, either.

## Worlds as Characters

Every planet (or city, or star, or nebula, or Enigmatic Phenomenon) worth visiting has *character,* a unique feel that is more than just the sum of the literal details that it's comprised of. Capturing this "spirit" is a worthy goal for the Narrator; it will lend relity to the gaming experience, and even help guide the story in the face of unexpected events!

Worlds are characters. And, like any other important member of your supporting cast (planets as PCs can wait for another day!), they will be called upon to respond to your Crew in ways that you can't possibly predict right now. The wealth of detail needed to answer even some very *basic* questions even a tiny planet is beyond the available hobby time of any but the most obsessive (and probably unemployed) gamer, so good Narrators save their sanity be mastering the art of *apparent* detail, creating a persona for a place, a "scalable" guide to what it's like to be there. This allows them to face the inevitable raised questions with confidence. By defining a locale's "behavior" in *human* terms, a narrative template can be created to answer these questions on the fly with a consistency that will impress players and require on minimal effort on the part of the harried Narrator.

A well-defined NPC has motive, resources & limitations, and a personality. Any of these three can be applied via metaphor, if you wish, to *places,* as well:

### *Motive*

Places ("planets" by default, but the principles here apply at any scale) don't *really* want things, but they can certainly *seem* to, sometimes. Difficult mountains can seem hostile, haughty and mocking, wanting very much to lure in climbers, to tempt them to painful deaths on jagged rock. A familiar old family home is warm, comforting and safe — and it wants company. Just when you feel like you can pull yourself away and return to your everyday life, it presents you with another piece of your childhood, a bit of nostalgia to tempt you to stay a while longer. It wants you protected. It wants you to be home. An exotic port city is like a grand old Madame, worldly and sharp-witted, in aging lace and

perfume. It wants to survive, and it knows how to give a sailor a good shore leave — but she has expensive tastes . . .

Ascribing human motives to places is as old as the species; we project our feelings and expectations into metaphor to clarify our own attitudes, to communicate them to others, even to deal with fears or other strong feelings. It's why ships — including starships! — are called "she." When a place becomes as important *as* a person, we begin to treat it like one. *[The bus that the author often writes on clearly wants to collect hats, since it's taken two already in the past few months!]* As a Narrator, you can turn this age-old habit to your advantage by creating the motives that will *be* observed, instead of waiting for visitors to do it retroactively.

***Resources & Limitations***

Not resources like dilithium mines or stretches of arable land (although those can drive stories, certainly!), but resources in the *character* sense: the tools at the character's disposal to pursue its motives and make its personality known. If the Narrator has decided that an alien world "want the Crew dead" (certainly one of the simplest "motives" to apply) the next step is to determine what "skills" and "equipment" the hostile environment has to get the job done. Trees that hypnotize with the soft rustling of their boughs? Venomous (but cute) fuzzy animals? "Edible" plants with a hidden taint of poison or disease? Explore the planet's character further to choose appropriate "weapons" for the battle to come: does the planet want them dead quickly and efficiently? Or is the world more . . . sadistic? creative? scientific? As long as we're building "killer planets," we may as well give them a little *style* . . .

Along with a character's resources, we define its limits. A snubbed former lover wants to humiliate Our Hero, and has the blackmail photos to get the job done . . . But she won't do anything to risk her *own* spotless reputation. Her own pride and sense of self-preservation limit her as a foe, which is necessary for both drama and realism. Places, likewise, should have limits set on their ability to pursue "motives" to keep things interesting, whether or not those motives are described in benevolent, nasty, or entirely neutral terms. A planet that "wants" to entice and amuse archaeologists and historians (even planets can be vain, perhaps!) can't quite bring itself to reveal the *identity* of its long-dead inhabitants — a secret that it won't even tease about, because it also wants to maintain an air of mystery regardless of what's revealed. Thus limited, it will try even harder to entice with hints of lost art and technology . . . But if any research tries to read too deeply into who made it, he'll have to "win the planet's trust" a bit more to have a hope of success. Perhaps what the world *really* wants is a new colony.

***Personality***

This is where the fun *really* is. A planet's personality informs the motive and methods used to achieve it, but can also add "character for character's sake," providing an added depth of recognizable uniqueness to a setting. When the Crew beams down, they'll know the place. And other worlds will "feel" different from this one.

Like people, places can be friendly or hostile, open or secretive, playful or serious. Make a game of the creative process: name a personality trait that should have no possible metaphor "geographically," then take steps to create an exception to your own rule. Can

an island be coquettish? Can a mountain be whiny? Can an ancient alien ruin be selfish and callous?

Try playing on many different scales within the same setting, if you need the extra detail (for a world that will be re-explored throughout a series, for example). A world can be one personality, or a whole *community* of them (just like our own planet!) — with each town, region, or continent given its own motives, methods, and quirks of behavior. The Crew may even find themselves laying worlds "against one another," or playing "matchmaker," all while blissfully unaware of the metaphor they're helping bring to life.

**Personality Traits For Planets**

A brief sampling of traits restricted to flesh-and-blood characters, and how they can be reflected in rocks-and-water "people" instead:

***Touchy-Feely:*** Grabbing vines, clouds of windborne leaves or pollen, and even quicksand can give a place a very "hands on," tactile feeling. On dangerous worlds, Starfleet officers can learn Good Touch from Bad Touch the hard way!

***Shy:*** Flowers (or caves, or ancient vaults) that only open at specified times (or under special conditions), animals that scatter noisily at the first hint of intrusion, and constant darkness can make a place feel hesitant to share with strangers.

**Modest:** Initial scans show only trace minerals — hardly enough for mining. But beneath those mountains are a new metal that the sensors didn't know how to look for, just waiting to be discovered. Of course, some worlds may be "braggarts," instead, boasting of apparent value far beyond what's really available. A fine world to offer up as a diplomatic concession, perhaps!

***Nurturing:*** Food is always plentiful — tasty fruit or nuts seem to drip from every tree. The thick-leaved plants can be broken open for a healing natural salve, and the caves are filled with a blue lichen that glows to light the way when the crew's own lamp is crushed. For a darker spin on this, the planet can be a little *smothering,* insecure and complaining when its "charges" want to do something on their own.

***Insane:*** From upside-down fish to apparently-impossible weather patterns, an "insane" world is just as likely to be "crazy like a fox." Finding the rationale beyind the apparent madness may be the only way the Crew can escape a deadly trap!

***Helpless:*** A common trait among worlds "ravaged" by the shortsighted ecological waste of those who inhabit it. The world's ecology is failing, and the planet's life unravelling at the seams. The Crew can't help but notice the frail, doe-like animal painfully trapped in colonists' barbed wire, or the ancient tree, nearly dead from the toxins in the soil. "Help!" cries the planet — can the Crew save it?

## Coming Home: The Consequences of Discovery

Sometimes, the most exciting part of an explorer's career is what happens in the *aftermath* of an important discovery. Even when the journey is completed painlessly, with new and

wondrous things safely found, scouted, holographed and catalogued, real conflict can be generated as a consequence of success. The important variable in this kind of story is the *objective* of the antagonists.

- ***Antagonist Objective: Cover Up or Destroy the Discovery*** — Sometimes, a new planet or interstellar phenomenon contains something so revolutionary that it would cause massive societal change. A handful of the many possible examples includes a cure for a previously-incurable disease, living space for a species with very special requirements, or ancient technology that could upset a balance of power. The antagonist will be somebody *threatened* by the potential change. The chemists who prosper producing the only known (incomplete) treatment for the disease, for example, might want to protect their interests. Perhaps the leaders of the refugee species would lose power if their people found a new home. The Antagonists needn't be motivated by selfishness or greed; either. A well-meaning interstellar government (even the Federation itself!) might feel that the galaxy isn't yet ready for that new technology . . .
- ***Antagonist Objective: Monopolize or Unfairly Exploit the Discovery*** — Of course, not everybody wants to shut an amazing discovery away where nobody can see it. Some are very eager to see it properly used — provided *they* are the ones who get to do the using. Just as some parties tend to be threatened by new discoveries, some others will smack their lips in eager desire for it, and move to make it their own. The explorers are often regarded as an untidy loose end, which means the Crew are more likely to face direct threats if this is the antagonist's goal. If the Narrator is in the mood to run something a little darker than usual, this is an excellent goal for an "inside" villain — a member of the Crew's own expedition who decides that she alone should benefit from what the Crew has found. If the Crew are working for a scientific foundation or other non-Starfleet sponsor, their own benefactors may turn out to be their foes, if the uses they have in mind for the discovery conflict with what the Crew feels is morally just, safe, or reasonable.
- ***Antagonist Objective: Discredit or Debunk the Discovery*** — There are few discoveries more dangerous than those that shed light on a sacred or protected area of darkness. Bringing home information that calls ancient beliefs into question, or answers a riddle that nobody believed could be answered, can be just as threatening to some as more concrete discoveries like habitable worlds and alien technology. The difference is that simply destroying the discovery is seldom good enough; once the news is out, it's out for good. What follows, then, is a dramatically different spin on the "Cover Up or Destroy" story, where the antagonists do everything in their power to discredit the Crew, to counter their discovery by making it look like the product of poor research, shoddy logic, or even making it out to be a hoax. This is a fight that can get very dirty, be fought on many fronts, and endanger the professional reputations and careers of the Crew. If they have skeletons in their closet (or innocent events that can be made to look like skeletons with a little effort), they may find that the fame they've earned as explorers can have a very dark side, indeed. Definitely a story for adult gamers, this one has plenty of potential for character-driven drama and tense personal conflict.

Of course, this kind of thing shouldn't happen *every* time the Crew returns from a successful expedition. Part of the joy of exploring in *Star Trek* is coming home for the metaphorical ticker-tape parade to enjoy the wash of praise and have something biological named after you (or something geographic, or astronomical, or even a *ship*). "Aftermath"

stories like those described above work best when used as episodic stories where the discovery itself is little more than Act One, or as the penultimate chapter of a series arc focusing on a single, epic expedition.

### *New Neighbors, New Neighborhoods*

Exploration episodes give the Crew an enjoyable opportunity to expand the *Star Trek* universe — new worlds and new civilizations, once discovered, become a part of the setting, making available new antagonistic "heavies" to fight, new allies for cultural exchange, new members of the Federation or (if uninhabited) the site of important new colonies.

Even if the series is entirely exploration-oriented, the Narrator will find that players enjoy keeping tabs on their discoveries, and will welcome new items and other reports like soldiers waiting for boxes of baked goods from home! Pleasantly, this provides a healthy handful of benefits for the game. It adds depth and continuity even if the series is otherwise episodic; it gives an exploring vessel a tangible tie to the events of the Federation (all the while *emphasizing* their isolation from it, which is good); and it lays in seed for a potential bumper crop of later subplots, sequels, entire series, and even new members of the Crew! If a game spans enough time with the same play-group, a player could discover a new planet in one series and play a man born on a colony there in a later one. This is especially satisfying if the colony was named after the original character! And today's new alien neighbors can be tomorrow's Academy cadets . . .

Of course, in a series that combines exploration with other kinds of tales (like *Star Trek: The Next Generation* itself) the Crew can take a more active role in the new-neighbor(hood) subplots, or they can develop into a major series arc, spawning every possible kind of *Star Trek* episode.

# ASSORTED SIDEBARS

### Starfleet's Motives

While many explorers do what they do for the love of discovery (or because they're more comfortable finding new civilizations than twiddling their thumbs back in their old one), most expeditions are sponsored by somebody back home (typically Starfleet, or a scientific institute of some kind). That "somebody" often has a specific goal in mind beyond simple discovery. Even Starfleet doesn't explore *just* to explore, but rather to find new friends and allies for enriched cultural exchanges, to find inhabitable worlds for colonies, resource-rich worlds for industry, and to expand the Federation's body of knowledge to improve everything from trade routes to medical science. Most expeditions aren't "general-purpose." Rather, Starfleet chooses the ship, the crew, and the equipment on board to suit the expedition's goal.

The Narrator should keep this in mind when designing an episode or series about exploration. What about this particular sector, system, or world made it seem appealing? Did long-range scans indicate a likely M-Class world? Did a spectrographic analysis suggest the presence of dilithium? Was the site the source of an ancient, undeciphered signal? The galaxy is gigantic (literally "astronomical!") and Starfleet cannot, in a century or

a dozen centuries, hope to explore all the stars that can be reached with current warp drive technology, so it must choose. The reasons for those choices form the basis for many decisions the Narrator must make about his story, and can directly impact both the Crew and their vessel.

**The Navigator's Tale?**

Some great *discoveries* aren't *destinations* at all. Rather than being planets, stars, nebula, or other "locations," they're pathways that can open up new possibilities for interstellar navigation. This can be anything from a stretch of space where warp travel is somehow enhanced, where navigation itself is safer or simpler, or space-time "shortcuts" like ancient artificial gateway systems or stable wormholes. Some of these require development and further exploration, and all of them can stir controversy and cause conflict as the face of the interstellar "map" threatens to change in their wake.