

Mephit's Guide to GMing NPC Ships in *Star Trek*

When players run their ships, they have a whole team to do so, both in game and at the table. You're on your own which can lead to some flailing and panicking. Fear not, though, you can treat your NPC ship like any other NPC with a few short-cuts and easy references.

Know the Basics

On the surface, NPC starships work just like starships commanded by PCs. However since there are far fewer important characters on an NPC ship (if there are any at all) they sometimes function differently. All of the Actions and Minor Actions taken by unnamed NPC starship crews happen on one turn. The rule to remember is **don't take more than one action for a given bridge position** since the nameless NPCs will be focused on individual things. As some guidelines, here are your priorities for an NPC ship every combat round.

- **Move the Ship:** Because this affects your attacks, do this before the next step. Normally this is just an easy maneuver unless there are Breaches to the ship's Engines, but you might also want to take *Evasive Action* or *Attack Pattern* depending on the ship's situation.
- **Shoot at the PCs:** Unless you have a pressing reason not to, keep the pressure up on the PCs with your NPC ship's weapons. This is all pretty straightforward and many rounds might be the only rolls you actually make for the NPC crews.
- **Fix Damage:** Every system that's knocked out on an NPC should be restored at the start of the round since *Restore* is a Minor Action and there are plenty of people on the bridge. After that, the Internal Systems officer should fix up damage and resources. If the ship's Power or Shields are likely to be reduced to zero next round do that, otherwise fix systems which are Damaged or Disabled as a result of Breaches. If there is nothing to Damage Control, then work on the lower of Shields or Power.
- **Scans and Other Stuff:** Scanning for weaknesses is a great move for the sensor operator (usually the bridge science officer) to make. Likewise, the officer on comms might want to jam signals from the PCs' ship or run Damage Reports.
- **Second Action of Some Sort:** I don't necessarily recommend it, but one of the people on the enemy bridge can *Override* another station (see p. 221) to take an action you've already taken. This increases the Difficulty by 1 and it means something else doesn't happen but given the number of bridge positions that's probably alright. Save this for when you really, really need more repairs or you think your ship's about to go down and you want to make two phaser shots.

Crew Types

With an NPC starship the crew often doesn't matter at all. For that matter, you might want NPC crewmembers on your players' ship on rare occasions. For that, there's the chart on page 225 which is recreated below.

CREW QUALITY	ATTRIBUTE	DISCIPLINE
Basic	8	1
Proficient	9	2
Talented	10	3
Exceptional	11	4

Bridge Positions

Mostly because I'm constantly flipping pages to find it, here is a summary of what systems are covered under what bridge position on 23rd century and 24th century bridges.

SYSTEM	23 RD CEN.	24 TH CEN.	SYSTEM	23 RD CEN.	24 TH CEN.
Helm	Helm	Conn	Tactical Sys.	Helm or Nav	Tactical
Navigator	Navigator		Communications	Communications	
Sensor Op.	Science	Operations	Security Over.	Helm or Nav	
Internal Sys.	Sci or Comms				

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Plan Some Tactics

Since NPC ships typically come with generic stats (your average *Vor'cha* Attack Cruiser or *D'deridex* warbird) making a truly memorable encounter with one takes some pre-planning.

- **Create a Custom Rule:** You can un-generify an NPC ship by giving it something special. This can be the crux of a mission, an important part of a scene, or just some tweak you come up with to challenge a crew that's faced a bunch of this type of ship already. A good source is NPC abilities and Talents. Maybe the NPC ship has a genius engineer who can run Damage Control well. Maybe it has a captain who can issue commands like a pro. Borrow an ability that an individual NPC has and turn it into a ship ability.
- **Foreshadow Reinforcements:** You can always spend Threat to bring in ships, but probably lower Scale ships are best. Drop hints ahead of time about what allies the enemy ship(s) might have in the area. If there's a military outpost in the sector then a pair of *B'rel*-class vessels won't seem like they're coming out of nowhere. If you mention possible reinforcements and they never show up, they've still made your players consider and that's worth something in itself.
- **Use the Environment:** Think of your favorite starship encounter from *Star Trek*. There are plenty but I think there's a good chance you thought of something like the cat-and-mouse nebula scene in *Wrath of Khan*, a chase through the Badlands, or *Voyager's* desperate sprints through Borg transwarp hubs. All of these are memorable partially because the challenge isn't just another ship but a larger phenomenon. It doesn't have to be every time but throwing in an environmental element can change up the game in a really memorable way.
- **Think up zones:** *Star Trek Adventures* doesn't involve as much tactical thinking as other 2d20 games, but it's still there. When you know a space battle is coming up, figure out some zones for it to take place in. Some can involve environmental effects (which is covered by the advice above) and others can have stationary allies. Maybe instead of engaging with two birds-of-prey, the PCs engage with one bird-of-prey and a weapons platform that can't change its zone. This gives the conn officer a little puzzle to figure out and makes the encounter more memorable.
- **Put an Important Commander Onboard:** Again, not something to overuse, but if there's an NPC onboard the enemy ship then they get their own turn and they can employ special abilities as well. If nothing else, they can use the commanding officer Tasks to grant their crew extra Threat or assist in important actions against the PCs. Make sure that the players know that this person is onboard and important (through some pre-encounter posturing, for example) and then have the "camera cut to them" during the battle.

Ships as Locations

Ships in *Star Trek Adventures* occupy some middle ground between characters and places. It's easy to see how they aren't quite characters but can be easy to forget how they aren't quite places. If the crew weren't around, how would a Ferengi marauder be a different element in the game than a Romulan warbird?

Environmental effects are one good way to do this. Maybe the warbird is laden with security traps while the marauder has lots of ornamental features that confuse Engineering Tasks. Another option is **Traits**, honestly one of the only consistent uses for Traits that I've found. Having a core Trait for a ship means that people onboard (or interacting with it) can spend Determination of it fits the Trait, or gain Determination for "acting against" the Trait. The latter I interpret as volunteering to take a disadvantage because of the Trait. Increasing the Difficulty of preventing a warp core breach because you don't know Cardassian technology well or because it is an Old Ship are both legit.