

Mephit's Guide to GMing *Star Trek* NPCs

One of the hardest part of being a GM is playing all the different characters that the PCs run into. There are resources available if you want to improve your voice acting, improvisation, and other aspects to actually portraying the NPCs at the table, but in this document we're focused on the nuts and bolts of running NPCs that are memorable encounters and don't just get steamrolled by those pesky Player Characters.

Know the Basics

NPCs work just like PCs except for the ways they don't.

- **They use Threat instead of Momentum.** This isn't a huge difference since all the Momentum spends can be spent as Threat instead. However, Threat is a pool for everything you do as a GM so when you buy an extra die just know that it will impact your ability to trigger environmental effects or bring in reinforcements.
- **They aren't meant to last.** When a PC dies or is imprisoned it's a big deal, and the same goes for supporting characters, major foes, and important allies. Most NPCs, though, are good for a scene or episode so don't let them steal too much limelight or prep time. Also, don't waste Avoid an Injury spend on keeping a beat-up nobody in the fight when you can just bring in fresh reinforcements.
- **Don't get caught up in stats.** A lot of NPCs don't qualify even as Minor characters. Don't worry about stats and if you need to roll you can use the genetic crew stats on page 225. For those NPCs that do need stats, consider reskinning an existing NPC before devoting a bunch of time. Sure making a unique Breen stat block is fun but if it's for a short barfight then just use the Klingon warrior stats and move on.

Plan For Things to Go Wrong

One thing that can make your NPCs more effective is to think about what they will do when/if the PCs start to run circles around them. Imagine if James Kirk had some epic combo that shut down Khan Noonien Singh before he got a chance to even start his master plan. How could Khan's hypothetical GM make sure that character was a memorable and worthwhile challenge? Here are some ideas.

- **Don't Just Inflate the Stats:** This is pretty universal advice but if you boost an NPC's stats mid-game then there are only a few ways it can go. You might get away with it and then you worry about every future NPC or your players might call you on it and then the game seems rigged. Either way, you're unlikely to create a character that pushes the PCs without shutting down the game purely on mechanics. It's like building the perfect car: it's theoretically *possible* but have you honestly seen it?
- **Foreshadow Reinforcements:** One of my favorite Threat spends is spending Threat to bring in reinforcement characters (see page 86). This can seem like rigging the game too, even though it's in the rules, so try to get ahead of that by foreshadowing allows for your NPC. If the party is infiltrating a Romulan base, talk about the security alarms triggered by the firefight which let's you bring in a bunch of uhlans without it seeming cheap. Worst case scenario you make the players sweat but don't actually need to Call Reinforcements and they remember it as the time they "barely escaped."
- **Have Some Environmental Effects At the Ready:** This isn't always part of encounter building, you can just have a set of these at the ready. When you have 3 extra Threat trigger an "EPS blowout" or "Emergency Lighting." The idea with these are that they make it hard to engage an enemy so your villain can disappear to come back later.
- **Counter Those Complications:** Just like players can spend Momentum to remove Complications you can too. This actually works putt better in the long run because you're not adding a bunch of junk. A scene that winds up with every Task as Diff 5 is long and frustrating. One where the enemy dismantles all the PCs' edges will have them screaming "Khaaaaaan!"
- **Think of a Dramatic Exit:** There's always the chance that you'll get a stack of Threat and you can use that to boost your NPC's rolls and create a ton of Complications. This is only a stop-gap, though, and could just as quickly shut down the game as all the gears seize up to halt the plot and save your NPC. Instead, think about how your NPC would disappear if you need to spend a boatload of Threat to end the scene early (see page 281). Do they have a ship in orbit? An emergency transporter protocol? A zealous follower who will blow themselves up so that the leader can escape? Build it in with foreshadowing and, like with reinforcements, at worst it's a threat you never even have to use.

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Think of Every Kind of Conflict

RPGs are often focused on combat but *Star Trek* only rarely is. Don't let the language of the NPC rules fool you: they can be used in every sorry of conflict that *Star Trek Adventures* has to offer.

Use all the Threat spends at your disposal in Social Conflict as well where Reinforcements might come to the Romulan senator's aid in the form of a crowd that shouts approval or a Federation diplomat that tells the PCs to "back down." You can also consider throwing in Complications or bringing in an environmental effect of players are breezing through your Gated Challenge to repair their busted shuttle. When I first started GMing *Star Trek Adventures* I let the Threat pile up out of combat and then spent like crazy during fights. Now I try to spend it all the time and my stories seem a lot more like *Star Trek* episodes.

Tips for Common NPC Abilities

While most NPCs in *Star Trek Adventures* have unique special abilities, there are a couple common abilities outlined in the core rulebook on pages 312-313. Here's some specific advice for those, either when they are written or if you want to use them to modify an existing NPC.

- **Extraordinary Attribute X:** This ability can be serious bad news as it allows the NPC to easily outshine the Player Characters. That's always a recipe for frustrated players so make sure you don't let that frustration build into table-flipping. A good counter-tactic for this is to avoid opposed rolls so encourage players to try that. Lying to a creature with Insight (1) is an uphill battle but using Insight to analyze its tactics isn't any harder than any other NPC.
- **Fast Recovery X:** Obviously a fast-healing creature is going to wind up making combat drag on. Avoid *D&D*-style slugfests since that's not a great fit for the genre and it isn't what this system is really designed for. Complications are a good thing to throw at such a creature instead and using command actions to generate Momentum for extra damage can make sure the hits are big enough to matter.
- **Immune to X:** Specific tactics using this ability and countering it will certainly depend on *what* the creature is immune to but in general the time for players to learn about this is *not* in the middle of an all-out battle. Things can turn deadly if PCs are planning on using something against a creature and it is totally ineffective, but *Star Trek Adventures* PCs typically aren't throwing around cold damage or fear effects anyways. Reveal this information during research before the PCs tangle with the NPC or bring it up in a situation where they can retreat and figure it out, like when the *Enterprise-D* crew first met the Borg and then had to debrief and try some new tactics.
- **Invulnerable:** This is a potentially very deadly ability so be up-front about it. Make sure players either know for sure that the NPC is invulnerable before they pull a phaser on it, or make sure the first phaser shot doesn't turn into a fight and that it's clear it had *no* effect. Using the **Specific Weakness** variety has a lot of planning to it like Immune above (break out the Scientific Theory rules if you want) while the **Wrathful** option is great for beings like the gods encountered in the original series or for Q. Attacking a Wrathful NPC will result in a quick response to teach them a lesson and then back to a Social Conflict again. It's possible to overcome a **Staggered** NPC by just concentrating fire but this can feel like a long drawn-out bore. To keep up the tension, try adding some targets that the PCs *can* damage so that they feel the pressure and also feel some small accomplishments.
- **Machine X:** This ability combines the effects of Immune with an added Resistance. In other words, these are some of the most resilient foes the PCs might face and fights with them will be longer than normal. This makes sense (think of the long running battles against the Borg) but it also means that you shouldn't keep throwing these enemies at the PCs until they beat them all. Think of some other tactical situations, such as mechanical adversaries that frequently ignore the PCs (like the Borg), or have a specific vulnerability that allows them to be shut down or otherwise compromised.
- **Menacing and Threatening X:** These two abilities just add a flat amount to Threat which makes them both easy to add and easy to benefit from. Overusing them, though, can lead to the players feeling like things are stacked against them so be sure you have a good reason when it comes up. It's also best for recurring characters so that the players can plan for it next time.