Mephit's Guide to Being Effective in *Star Trek* Social Conflict

One of the best things in *Star Trek* is that they have drama and action that doesn't always require shooting things. Sometimes it does and there have been plenty of wars and fights to the death in the TV series but often it's an issue of diplomacy or philosophical argument. This is definitely a great element to bring into a campaign of *Star Trek Adventures*, but how do you make it more than rolling dice against each other? How can you have a drawn out argument with an NPC that feels as high stakes as firing phasers? Well, here are some things to help players feel more competent and comfortable when at the negotiating table.

Know the Basics

The bare mechanics of Social Conflict is covered in *Star Trek Adventures* rulebook in Chapter 7.2 (pages 164-168) and some additional coverage is given in the *Command Division Supplement* in Chapter 5.3. The additional stuff is really just some extra ideas for the GM to use and we'll cover that in Understand the Scope below.

At its core, Social Conflict is just like any other Task in the game. You make a roll based on your Abilities and Disciplines and the GM sets the stakes. Since it's dependent on what the other party is willing and able to do you might succeed automatically or you might fail outright: you can't climb air or convince someone to give you information they don't have so those are fails from the start, and it's simple to walk up stairs or ask someone for the time so then you succeed automatically unless there's something crazy going on. In the middle is the grey area that enters into any task. You can identify some plants, but can you identify *these* plants? The guard is willing to take some risk in exchange for bribe, but will he take on *this much* risk? That's where you're rolling.

Pick Your Tactic

There are four different Social Tools that *Star Trek Adventures* outlines for its Social Conflict, but this is really codifying what everyone is already thinking anyways. The Social Tool you pick will determine how easy or hard it is for you to complete your job and they come down to this: **are you lying or are you threatening?**

- **If you're lying, that's Deception.** This is a familiar tactic to roleplayers in many systems, the old silver-tongued shortcut. This is an Opposed Task where the other person is trying to see through your lie and you're trying to sell it. The obvious drawback is that once it starts going wrong (and especially if you start rolling Complications) it's easy for the whole thing to unravel.

- **If the another person is lying, that's Evidence.** If you are trying to figure out if someone is lying to you, that's just the Opposed roll for Deception as described above. However, if you're trying to make someone else see the truth then you're presenting Evidence. Alternatively, you might be presenting Evidence of something that's true but that people don't want to believe, such as that they are really a hologram. The book has you making rolls to generate bits of evidence that mechanically become Traits which you can rely on later to make your point.

- **If you're threatening, that's Intimidation.** If the other party feels like you might hurt them if they don't go along with things then you're intimidating them. This includes any kind of harm, not just physical: tanking someone's career, embarrassing them publicly, exposing their lies, or anything else that they wouldn't want to happen all count. This is another Opposed Task but the results are unequal: an intimidator failing just doesn't seem that tough (and might lose credibility), whereas a target failing will fold and give up information. You also need to be able to follow up on your threats, since failing to get what you want and then relenting makes subsequent intimidation tough.

- **If you're not lying or threatening, that's Negotiation.** This could be political negotiations like working out a trade deal but it could be personal as well. Bartering for goods, exchanging information in return for safe passage, or trading prisoners all fall under the category of Negotiation. In this sort of Social Conflict, neither side is totally lying and neither side is coercing the other. This doesn't mean that both sides are telling the whole truth, of course, or that neither side is being threatening. You're just mostly coming at the situation with the expectation that each party will give a little to meet in the middle.

As a small side note, for any of the Opposed Tasks listed above you don't have to have the same Difficulty on both sides. Claiming that you're a Starfleet commander when you're wearing the right number of pips on your collar is a fairly easy sell, whereas it's hard for someone to double-check that claim in the moment. Likewise, Intimidating someone when you have a phaser to their head is a pretty trivial task but if they are bound and helpless it's hard for them to act tough. *Advocate for yourself* if you think that your side's Difficulty should be lower or that the other side's should be higher.

Mephit's Guide to Being Effective in
Star Trek Social Conflict

Understand the Scope

It's important to pace yourself so that you don't peak early in Social Conflict, just like in physical conflict. While some Social Conflict situations are a one-and-done Task, others fall under the categories of Challenges (*STA*, p. 89-90) or Extended Tasks (*STA*, p. 90-91). Each of these has their own unique set of considerations so think about what you're engaged in before you blow all your Momentum on that one roll. For more information on these topics, see ***Mephit's Guide to Being Effective with*** Star Trek *Tech!*

- **Linear Challenges:** These are the most straightforward kind of challenge but they can be boring... but that's the GM's problem to fix! The biggest thing to keep in mind with this sort of challenge is to keep resources for later. You don't want to roll big on steps one and two, then faceplant on step three and lose everything you've worked towards.

- **Gated Challenges:** This has the same advice as Linear Challenges above but usually you have multiple pathways to reach the end of the challenge. Keep an eye on your resources and also make sure you know what's involved in each of the new Tasks to move forward so that you can maximize your chances at success.

- **Group Challenges:** This might be the best sort of Social Conflict since it avoids the common issue of talking things out where the party face is having a ball and the rest of the table is boring. Of course, not everyone is good at Social Conflict skills. If that's you, consider assisting in a Task, Creating an Advantage, or removing a Complication to give the diplomats a better chance.

- **Extended Tasks:** Extended Tasks are the same rules as physical combat but for non-physical situations. You do work (damage) to a Work track (Stress) which is countered by the target's Resistance. You should probably look back over all the rules but the biggest bits of advice are to roll big if you can (trying for a Breakthrough) and to make sure you get rid of Complications (to make sure you have steady progress).

Create Advantages

Often, the consequences of failing are harder to get past in Social Conflict than they are in physical conflict. If you miss someone with a phaser, you can just take another shot the next round. If you insult someone's culture, though, they might storm out of the room and you have to work hard to even get back to square one. On the plus side, it's easier to set up Advantages ahead of time in social situations than it is in physical combat. There might be *some* fights where you can set up an ambush or a secret weapon, but in the majority of social situations you'll be able to read up on a culture, prepare a gift, or review Starfleet Intelligence reports. If not, make some in the moment like Air of Command or Offer On the Table.