

Adventure Seed: OUTSIDE CONTEXT PROBLEM

(most suitable for TNG and later eras)

While in the midst of whatever their current assignment is, the players' ship receives new orders from Starfleet Command: proceed immediately to a star system on the very edge of explored space (in whichever direction suits your current campaign). A deep space monitoring array has reported massive and currently unexplainable energy readings, and the players' ship is the closest one available to investigate.

It's a five-day journey to get there (alter duration as needed for your campaign), during which time nothing in the way of new information about the strange phenomena is forthcoming. The data provided by the array indicates that the readings began suddenly, and are constant, and the power apparently being generated is significantly more than could be produced by every ship in Starfleet acting in concert. The players can use the five days to speculate on what could be causing the energy output, and/or to prepare in any way they can think of.

When they arrive, they can immediately see the source of the energy readings: it's a massive starship of completely unfamiliar design. It's rectangular, and approximately 20 km x 5 km x 5 km in size (probably Scale 10, or possibly even higher). Players might immediately think of the Borg, but they will quickly see that's not the case. There are people – a whole city – on the “upper” surface of the ship, and an atmosphere held in by force fields. The ship hails the players, announcing itself as the “General Function Vehicle *Destination Unknown*” and explaining that it is from a civilization called The Ethos, which is based in the Greater Magellanic Cloud, and they're just “paying a visit to the neighbors.”

The Ethos is, of course, Iain M. Banks' Culture with the serial numbers filed off. It will quickly become clear that the *Destination Unknown* is controlled by a super-intelligent AI (it calls itself and its fellow AIs Brains, and make sure you use that capital B!), and the human (or, at least, more-or-less human with some interesting biological upgrades, as revealed by medical scans) crew is pretty much along for the ride as passengers.

The *Destination Unknown* will make itself open for the players to visit, and they'll be allowed to see pretty much everything. The technology of the ship is far beyond anything Federation science has imagined (it can maintain a speed of 200,000 c indefinitely without putting any real strain on the engines; it can easily and comfortably house over a billion passengers; although it has no weapons as such, its force field equipment can be used destructively and would rip through a starship's shields and hull as though it were tissue paper; it has teleporters capable of transporting anything up to a decent-sized asteroid across a solar system instantly; etc). The Ethos citizens view the players and their ship as a quaint, possibly even “cute” curiosity.

The ship itself will be a lot more curious about the players' ship, and the Federation more generally, because the Ethos does not have a Prime Directive. It's more the opposite; they view it as their responsibility to help uplift primitive civilizations, and from their point of view – both technologically and morally - the Federation is as backwards as the Federation would view 18th century Earth.

The players' task will be:

First to figure this out (they could discover that the *Destination Unknown* has accessed all their ship's computer libraries; they might put together the pieces from interactions with the *Destination Unknown* and its passengers; characters with telepathy or other special abilities might be able to use those).

Second, to come up with a way to get the Ethos to lose interest in the Federation and back off somehow. They might try a variation on Kirk's strategy in "The Corbomite Maneuver", or a logical and passionate defense of the Prime Directive, or anything else the players might dream up (although straight-up force is virtually certain to fail).

The best-case ending for this adventure is the *Destination Unknown* heading back home, with a plan to come back in a couple of millennia when, hopefully, the Federation will be ready to interact with the grown-ups of intergalactic civilization as near-equals. The worst-case is that the Ethos becomes absolutely convinced that the Federation requires serious intervention to help it develop into a mature and responsible society worthy of being allowed to participate in intergalactic civilization. Such intervention could take virtually any form, from subtle infiltration and nudging over decades, to blatant and massive displays of power across entire Quadrants.

Complication #1: The Romulans detected the energy readings, too, and have sent a Warbird (or several) to investigate. It's unlikely that anything good can come of that. If nothing else, any hostilities between the players and the Romulans will only convince the Ethos that the squabbling children of the Alpha and Beta Quadrants clearly require strict adult supervision.

Complication #2 (if the GM is feeling nasty): The Borg detected the energy readings, and have sent a Cube (or several) to investigate. Can they assimilate a 20km long mega-starship? It would be best not to find out.