

STAR TREK: THE TRUTH MACHINE

An RPG adventure based on the Young Adult novel of the same name by Christopher Cerf and Sharon Lerner and published by Random House. This adventure is intended as a basic introduction to the RPG rules and gameplay for 2 to 5 players. Original illustrations by Jane Clark. STA conversion by Roger Taylor.

Synopsis: Deceived by a false distress signal, the crew of the U.S.S. *Enterprise* are led into an ambush and interrogated for the secrets of warp drive.

Conversion Notes:

1) Because of the specific limitations expressed in the original story, “resisting” the Truth Machine is actually neither here nor there. The technobabble explanation notwithstanding, the original story is explicit that- at its most effective- the machine renders its victims “honest”; not “compliant” or “helpful”. Its victims are not required to answer questions they are not asked, nor to volunteer information not specifically requested of them. The utility (or uselessness) of the Truth Machine therefore lies entirely upon the skill of the interrogator using it and upon the cleverness of the victim in either answering or omitting crucial data.

Nor, for obvious reasons, is the machine of any use against characters who simply do not possess the answers needed. As a prime example, Doctor McCoy (a “simple, country doctor”) would possess only a layman's understanding of warp mechanics and could not provide the sort of precise technical data needed). Interrogating him would be a waste of time.

2) Additionally, even the simplest warp drive is a highly complex piece of machinery with stringent (and unforgiving) technical specifications. The original story's conceit that the “secret of warp drive” could be broken down to a simple diagram is thus questionable at best.

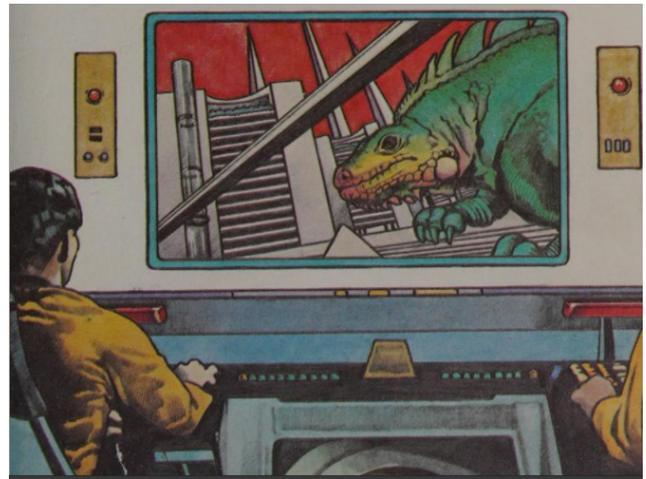
For that reason, this conversion assumes that the Fomalhaut already possess a practical warp drive design, but need help sorting out a last few crucial technical details.

Recommended Resources: [Star Trek Adventures: TOS Player Characters Supplement](#)

Directives:

- ▲ Uphold The Prime Directive.
- ▲ Neutralize the Fomalhaut threat.

<https://archive.org/details/startrektruthmac0000cerf>



ACT ONE

SPACE— THE FINAL FRONTIER

The adventure opens with the U.S.S. *Enterprise* cruising in deep space. The Captain should receive (and read for the rest of the players) Handout #1: Captain's Log.

As the Captain finishes reading his log, Lieutenant Uhura will report an incoming signal on the distress channel. Localizing (and strengthening) the signal requires TN 1 **Reason + Engineering or Science** test (assisted by the ship's **Comms + Science**) determines that the signal is automated and originates from Fomalhaut V.

Once the the signal is enhanced, the viewscreen is filled with fragmentary images of a large, modern metropolis. The streets of the city, however, are filled with fleeing citizens as dinosaur-like creatures rampage between the buildings, smashing and destroying everything in their path. A voice-over pleads for assistance as the scenes shift several times showing chaos, panic, and destruction before the message repeats.

Should the heroes check the Starfleet Database, (and they should) they receive Handout #2: Fomalhaut System Profile.

Starfleet regulations specify that the heroes have an obligation to assist wherever possible, and so a course should be plotted for Fomalhaut V; a TN 2 **Reason + Conn** test. Their estimated time of arrival is approximately six hours. A failure on the test above will add two hours to their travel time (Success At A Cost).

FOMALHAUT V

Arrival over Fomalhaut V is uneventful, and the viewscreen reveals a large, desolate world of sandy brown and red rock. A TN 1 **Insight + Security or Science** test (assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Science**) shows a large urban center (with numerous suburbs) in the northern hemisphere. The total population is roughly 1.2 million people.

There is no response to attempts at communications, though the distress signal keeps repeating until the heroes actually beam down.

ILLUSIONS SHATTERED

The Captain should decide whom (if anyone) is going to beam down. The default, of course, is the iconic Kirk-Spock-McCoy trio, though (ideally) all the player characters be included. Unless specified otherwise, the Landing Party should be equipped with the equally iconic phaser, tricorder, and communicator. Doctor McCoy, of course, should also take along his standard medical kit.

As the heroes materialize, they are initially met with a blast of unwelcome heat- the temperature at the beam-in point is 130°F (54°C)! As they take stock of their surroundings, however, the heroes realize their eyes are telling them something quite different than their equipment. There is no city, no panicked population, and no dinosaur-like creatures; only sand and blistered rock as far as the eye can see.

Before the heroes can take action, however, a TN 1 **Insight + Security** test reveals that they are surrounded- with two armed soldiers for each member of the Landing Party. The soldiers are humanoid- large and squat with heavy musculature and vaguely simian frames. Their faces are pear-shaped with narrow foreheads, small eyes, pug-noses, and large, wide mouths over even broader lantern jaws.

One of them steps forward and introduces himself as Colonel Kragg. He will apologize for the deception and threat of violence, but insists it is necessary as the people of Fomalhaut need their help.

Showing the heroes a tricorder-sized “little black box”, Kragg explains that everything the heroes saw was a computer-generated illusion fed into their sensors to bring them to the surface, and quickly invites them “below”. Before he leads them underground, however, Kragg demands the heroes' weapons and equipment.

The Colonel and his men are vigilant and suspicious- keeping their distance, covering the heroes multiple angles, and willing to stun the heroes rather than take any chances. Should the heroes attempt to resist or signal the *Enterprise*, they will be ruthlessly gunned down. Resolve the combat normally. The Gamemaster begins the

scene with two **Threat** per player character present and should not hesitate to spend it to keep this combat as one-sided as possible.

OPTIONAL SCENE— IN ORBIT. ¹

If any of the player characters remain aboard the orbiting *Enterprise*, they will receive an “All’s Well” message from “Captain Kirk” explaining that the situation is under control (for the moment). The Landing Party has made contact with the city elders (the local leadership) and will be in close consultation with them for the next several hours. Communication will likely not be possible during that time. “Captain Kirk” recommends that the crew conduct a new sensor survey of Fomalhaut V (and attempt to understand why *Daedalus*' survey was so wrong).

The message is (of course) yet another forgery by the Fomalhaut, but for verisimilitude (and entertainment value), the Captain's player should be rewarded with a point of **Determination** for playing out the deception.

Conducting the new survey should be treated as an Extended **Reason** + **Science** Task with a **Work** of 10, a **Magnitude** of 5, a **Resistance** of 1, and a **Base Difficulty** of 3. Each attempt should account for three hours of game (not actual) time.

One character aboard *Enterprise* should be designated the lead, and- if desired- one additional player character may assist. The lead rolls 2d20 (as normal), while anyone assisting rolls only 1d20.

For clarification, **Base Difficulty** is the number of successes the heroes must achieve before they can generate **Work**- in this case, 3 successes. Failing to meet the Base Difficulty, they've made no progress and “wasted” three hours.

Work is generated by rolling a number of ▲ (Challenge Dice) equal to 2 plus the lead character's **Science** score. A ▲ result of 1 or 2 is added

together. Results of 3 & 4 are ignored, and results of 5 & 6 each count as 1 (in addition to triggering an **Effect**). In this case, an **Effect** is a notable contradiction in the sensor data- a hint that all is not what it appears to be. Once the **Work** generated is totalled, it is reduced by 1 (the task's **Resistance**).

If the heroes achieve 5 or more **Work** in a single check- or 10 points (over however many rolls)- they achieve a **Breakthrough**. Each **Breakthrough** also reduces the **Base Difficulty** by 1 (to a minimum of 1) on subsequent checks.

The **Magnitude** is the number of **Breakthroughs** required to complete the Extended Task. In this case, the heroes need either 5 **Breakthroughs** (or a grand total of 50 **Work**) to complete the survey and realize their sensors are being lied to.

Once the task is complete, it becomes obvious that the *Enterprise* sensors are unreliable and a work around is needed. Shipboard characters should move to Modifications, below.

OPTIONAL SCENE— WILD GOOSE CHASE ¹

At the Gamemaster's discretion, the Fomalhaut may opt to divert the *Enterprise* in the form of another distress signal (Handout #3 Wellerman Distress Call). The supply ship “U.S.S. *Wellerman*” has been struck by a gravitic mine and badly hulled. She is adrift and her life support systems are failing. It will take the *Enterprise* six hours to reach the *Wellerman* at maximum speed.

If they attempt to do so, the heroes aboard *Enterprise* are unable to raise the Landing Party (as predicted above).

As noted in the footnote above, the Gamemaster should keep these players busy by making inquiries about what their characters are doing, any preparations they are making to assist the *Wellerman*, complaints from Engineering about the abuse the engines are taking, and calling for occasional Task Rolls, as needed.

¹ There is a completely understandable tendency to focus on the characters who are actively engaged in the primary storyline- in this case, the Landing Party. The Gamemaster is strongly advised (don't **make** me come down there) that the players whose characters are stuck aboard ship must be allowed to play as well, and to take special care to keep them busy and involved both with narrative detail and questions about **how** they are going about their business.

ACT TWO

UNDERGROUND CITY

Whether carried there or under their own power, the heroes are loaded onto an underground tram and given a tour of a series of massive caverns (similar to the Ocampo habitats) containing a large subterranean city, expansive factories, numerous shipyards, and extensive hangars filled with ships.

A TN 1 **Reason** + **Command** or **Security** test will suggest that the size and number of the vessels preclude peaceful purposes. They are too small for extended deep-space missions or for hauling cargo- making them unsuitable either for long-range exploration or trade missions. And there are simply too many of them for a reasonable local defense. If the heroes ask, Colonel Kragg will happily confirm that the Armies (note, not “people”) of Fomalhaut are preparing for a war of aggression- and the heroes are going to help them. The hangars already contain many hundreds of fighter- and corvette-sized warships, as well as expansive stocks of food, fuel, and armaments.

A TN 1 **Reason** + **Command** or **Security** test will affirm that these vessels individually are no match for a starship (let alone a fleet), they become dangerous in great numbers- numbers which the Fomalhaut appear to possess.

Taking the heroes to a comfortable briefing room and plying them with food and drink, Colonel Kragg will confess his problem: for all their technological advancement, the Fomalhaut warp drive currently suffers a number of small, crucial, fatal flaws- which he hopes the heroes will be gracious enough to correct.

Despite his facade of good manners, however, Kragg is fully confident of their cooperation- for he has an ace up his sleeve.

The Truth Machine

If the heroes refuse to assist the Fomalhaut, they are introduced to the crowning achievement of Fomalhaut technology- the Truth Machine. Kept in a separate laboratory, the machine is a large metal-and-glass booth containing an inclined bed and a large instrument array suspended from the ceiling.

As Colonel Kragg happily explains, the machine operates by directly stimulating or suppressing certain neurological processes (just as the original decoy illusion was created by feeding or omitting specific data into the ship's sensors).

The device compels its victims to tell the truth, no matter how hard they may resist. Whether they do so willingly or not, the heroes will correct the deficiencies in the Fomalhaut warp drive.

Kragg then conducts the heroes to a prison cell and given the technical specifications of the Fomalhaut warp drive to study.

OPTIONAL SCENE— MODIFICATIONS

Having discovered the precise nature of the deception, modifying the *Enterprise's* systems to counteract it is an Extended **Reason** + **Science** or **Engineering** (aided by *Enterprise's* **Computers** + **Engineering** or **Science**) task with a Work of 12, a Magnitude of 3, a Resistance of 0, and a base Difficulty of 2. Each roll should account for one hour of game (not actual) time. Once this second extended task is completed, the Fomalhaut deception is no longer effective, but the heroes still have no way of locating the Landing Party.

OPTIONAL SCENE— SEARCH PARTY

Should the *Enterprise* beam down a second party to search for the first, they too will discover that there is no city. They, too, will be ambushed by the Fomalhaut- though in this case they will be fired upon immediately. The Fomalhaut will press the attack (with essentially unlimited numbers of men) until the second party is either neutralized (captured) or retreats to the *Enterprise*.

OPTIONAL SCENE— WILD GOOSE REVEALED.

Upon arriving at the coordinates of the U.S.S. *Wellerman*, the *Enterprise* discovers only empty space.

A TN 2 **Insight** + **Science** (aided by the ship's **Sensors** + **Science**) reveals that there is NO evidence of any vessel passing through this area in the last several weeks- the heroes have been

deceived and must now make a six-hour speed run **back** to Fomalhaut V.

Upon returning to Fomalhaut V, however, the *Enterprise* discovers no trace of the city, its inhabitants, or their away party. Frustrating though it may be, the characters aboard the starship are (essentially) back to Square One and should begin the scans (and modifications) detailed in In Orbit, above.

ACT THREE

INTERROGATION

Because of the specific limitations of the Truth Machine (as expressed in the original story) it is far less formidable than one might think. The actual trick is misleading (either intentionally or by omission) Colonel Kragg and his engineers.

For purposes of the RPG, this Social Conflict is treated as a series of six Opposed **Daring** or **Reason + Command** or **Engineering** test against Kragg's **Control + Command** (and his focus of **Interrogate**). Kragg and his engineers have provided the heroes with the necessary technical specifications and are now attempting to exploit the hero's knowledge to their own advantage.

After the first successful test by the character being interrogated, the Gamemaster should reveal two things:

- 1) Coached by his engineers, Kragg is skillfully asking questions beginning with the general and narrowing to specific technical details about the flaws with the engine design.
- 2) The Truth Machine has the single effect of rendering its victims "honest"; not "compliant" or "helpful". Its victims are not required to answer questions they are not asked, nor to volunteer information not specifically requested of them.

Given this information, the player should then be asked what stratagem (if any) their character is using to mislead Kragg and his merry minions. Depending upon the rational used, the Gamemaster should provide either a penalty or a bonus to the

player's remaining rolls against Kragg. The Gamemaster is also advised to temper the interrogation with roleplaying instead of relying solely on the dice rolls.

Unless there is a clear winner, whomever wins the majority of the Opposed Tests is successful in achieving his aim (either gaining or denying the desired information). In the event of a tie (3-3), the victory goes to the player character.

PASSING TIME

Given their industrial base, the Fomalhaut will need only a day or two to modify (for better or worse) their prototype warp drive, and the heroes will occasionally being re-questioned as issues crop up. Alternately, Colonel Kragg or another senior Fomalhaut official (likely one of their top engineers) may wish to interact with the heroes- forcing the gaurds to move them from their cell several time per day.

Initially wary, the Fomalhaut will slowly relax as the heroes fail to try to escape (or at least cause trouble). Before long, the heroes are being escorted back and forth by only two guards. When the heroes finally **do** make an escape attempt, combat should be resolved normally.

Vulcan (Jedi) Mind Tricks

Anyone who has watched more than a little Star Trek will know that Vulcans possess telepathic powers. The climax of several Original Series episodes has hinged upon Spock using the mind meld to deceive guards into opening doors or otherwise engage in behavior beneficial to the players. This adventure is no different. Establishing telepathic contact with one of the guards requires a TN 3 **Control + Command** test (reduce the difficulty to 1 if Spock is able to physically touch the guard). Once contact has been made, Spock's player must inform the Gamemaster what (if any) ruse he is using to induce the guard to open the door (or otherwise aid them). This need not be complicated, but the Gamemaster should afford Spock a bonus on the subsequent Social test.

"Convincing" the guard to aid them requires an Opposed **Control** or **Daring + Command** against

the guard's **Reason + Security**. In addition to any bonuses awarded by the Gamemaster, the Guard's total successes should be reduced by 1 (the Fomalhaut assigned to routine guard duty are neither particularly bright nor particularly resistant to mental "tampering").

The Old "One-of-Us-Pretends-To-Be-Sick-So-We-Can-Jump-The-Guard" Trick

Another favorite Star Trek cliché/trope is for one of the characters feigns illness while the others pretend to minister to him and call for help from the guard. Convincing the guard to aid them requires an Opposed **Control** or **Daring + Command** against the guard's **Reason + Security**. Again, the Guards total successes should be reduced by 1 (the Fomalhaut assigned brig duty are generally not the brightest bulbs on the tree).

Once the guard is in the room, the heroes then clobber him and escape. Combat should be resolved normally.

Abroad and Below

If the heroes **do** manage to escape, they will find themselves lost in a large alien city with no friends, no communicators, few (if any) weapons, and no refuge. They will be hunted by- and must therefore evade or overcome- Fomalhaut security patrols (with the proviso that each battle will confrontation will allow the Fomalhaut to narrow the search).

It is possible (even likely) that the heroes may decide to capture one of the Fomalhaut's "little black boxes". In order to do so, the heroes will have to confront (or at least examine) at least three of the Fomalhaut search parties before discovering one carrying a "little black box". Once in possession of the device, a TN 1 **Reason + Engineering** test will allow Spock to decipher its function and operation. The "Little Black Box" is, essentially, a portable terminal with access to the Fomalhaut Central Computer. Using the device (and the appropriate skill checks) the heroes are now in a position to call for help, locate the Fomalhaut Engineering Lab, divert the search parties looking for them, or otherwise raise pure havoc in the Fomalhaut chain of command.

THE SMOKE TEST

Whether they escape and travel there on their own or are brought there by the Fomalhaut, the heroes should find themselves in an Observation Center overlooking the Engineering Lab to witness the prototype's initial start up.

Assuming that the heroes were able to deceive the Fomalhaut (either explicitly or by omission), the prototype will malfunction badly- exploding and scattering pieces all over the laboratory- including embedding a large chunk of smoking metal in the main window. Even if the test is successful, however, the Fomalhaut are unguarded and vulnerable- affording (finally?) the heroes to either liberate themselves or capture Colonel Kragg. Additionally, their own equipment (phasers, communicators, tricorder, and medical kit) are untended on one of the rooms tables.

There should be no more than four Fomalhaut present in the Observation Center (Kragg, his lead engineer, and two guards). Combat should be resolved normally (and if the heroes send to *Enterprise* for reinforcements, should be embarrassingly one-sided).

RESOLUTION

With Colonel Kragg and his lead engineer in custody, and with unrestricted access to the *Enterprise*, the heroes should have no trouble deleting the Fomalhaut database a/o imposing a peace between the Armies of Fomalhaut and the Federation.

At the very worst, a quick call to Starfleet Command will likely trigger a blockade of Fomalhaut V and nullify the danger.

Depending upon the needs of the story/campaign, however, the Gamemaster has a couple of seeds for future adventures at his disposal- based primarily on whether the Armies of Fomalhaut are indeed native to that world. If they are not, future adventures might seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) Where *DID* the Fomalhaut originate?
- 2) How did they get to the Fomalhaut system without a functional warp drive?

3) Who (if anyone) is backing them or would profit from their war of aggression?

In any case, unless the heroes behaved with uncharacteristic violence, they should be in Starfleet Command's good graces and free to return to their survey mission.

Non Player Characters

Fomalhaut Soldier (Minor NPC)- A uniformed brute in the Armies of Fomalhaut

Attributes

Control	9	Insight	8
Daring	8	Presence	7
Fitness	9	Reason	7

Disciplines

Command	2	Security	2
Conn	-	Science	-
Engineering	1	Medicine	1

Focuses: Phaser

Species and Traits: Fomalhaut

Combat

Weapons and Attacks:

Stress: 11

Unarmed Strike; Melee 3▲, Knockdown, Size 1, Nonlethal
Beam Weapon Pistol; Ranged, 3▲, Size 1, Intense,

Colonel Kragg (Notable NPC)- Leader of the Armies of Fomalhaut and mastermind of the ambush.

Attributes

Control	10	Insight	8
Daring	9	Presence	8
Fitness	9	Reason	7

Disciplines

Command	3	Security	2
Conn	0	Science	1
Engineering	2	Medicine	1

Focuses: Phaser, Interrogate

Trait: Fomalhaut. The Fomalhaut are a species of large, thickly built humanoids with vaguely simian features- small eyes, pug noses, large mouths, and lantern jaws. Their planet of origin is unknown, but in the mid-23rd century, they had established a large underground military installation on Fomalhaut V. Fomalhaut culture is currently geared towards waging a war of massive war of aggression with the intent of conquering the galaxy.

Combat

Weapons and Attacks:

Stress: 12

Unarmed Strike; Melee 3▲, Knockdown, Size 1, Nonlethal
Beam Weapon Pistol; Ranged, 3▲, Size 1, Intense,

Handouts

Handout #1 Captain's Log

"Captain's Log, Stardate 3198.4-

USS *Enterprise* is now entering the Fomalhaut Sector. Our mission is routine- updating our star charts on this part of the galaxy, adding any new planets and new phenomenon we discover and updating the information we already possess...

Enterprise is currently cruising at Warp Factor Four. All systems normal and functioning."

Handout #2 Fomalhaut System Profile

Also known as Alpha Piscis Austrini, Fomalhaut is the brightest star in the constellation *Piscus Austrinus* and is located some twenty-five light years from Earth. Fomalhaut is one of the brightest stars in the terrestrial sky and emits excessive amounts of infrared radiation.

Primary:	Type A3 V (Extremely bright, White giant)
Number of Planets:	8
Number of Class M Worlds:	1 (Fomalhaut V/Dagon)
Sapient Species:	None
Total System Population:	None
System Notes	First surveyed in 2173 by U.S.S. <i>Daedalus</i> . Despite the fact that Fomalhaut V is (technically) Class M, the planet lacks sufficient free water to support life. In addition, the excess infrared radiation creates regular surface temperatures in excess of 176°F (80°C). No sustainable biosphere has evolved and the surface is comprised on ancient, wind-blasted rock and huge deserts.

Handout #3 USS *Wellerman* Distress Call

"To any Federation vessel within range, this is the U.S.S. *Wellerman*, we have struck a gravitic mine near coordinate 273 by 81 by 90. We are afire and have sustained a serious hull breach. Our life support and damage control systems are failing. Please respond. Repeating, this is..." .