The Colborian Referendum

A Star Trek Adventures module

by Neal Zupancic, aka Nine Sided Dice

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Note: This adventure is currently in draft form. I've run it once and the players loved it, but in transcribing it here I may have overlooked something. Please feel free to send me feedback, questions, etc. Otherwise, have a great time!

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Synopsis

The people of Colbor III* have been invited to join the Federation. The government has decided to hold a referendum on joining, but there are some complications. First, given the existence of sentient AI on the planet, it must be determined whether AIs will be allowed to vote, and if so, under what circumstances. Second, the government and the Federation must work together to defend and verify the integrity of the elections. Finally, Starfleet must assist the government in implementing their decision, whether this is by negotiating an alternative, limited diplomatic arrangement, or delivering the full application package.

*Previously appearing in The Asylum Seeker.

Mission Directives

Mediate the disagreements between the Regime and Opposition
Observe the election and verify its validity
Encourage the Colborians to join the Federation, where appropriate

Suggested Watching and Reading

The Asylum Seeker - the previous Colborian module
TNG: The Measure of a Man
SNW: Ad Astra Per Aspera

Act I: Who Counts the Counters?

In Act I, players have a series of social encounters in which they familiarize themselves with the situation on Colbor III and the various stakeholders who have an interest in the outcome. This Act contains a suggested scene ordering with information presented in an order that will paint a clear picture for the PCs.

Because these scenes are all heavy on ideas and social interactions, it may be good from a pacing perspective to interleave Acts I and II. Whenever the discussions in Act I seem to become slow or boring, choose an event from Act II to throw in and give the players a challenge to overcome.

Scene 1: Starfleet

The captain receives orders to proceed to Colbor III in order to mediate a disagreement between the Colborian government and opposition factions regarding whether to allow AI systems to vote. Assuming your group has played through The Asylum Seeker, the captain should ideally already have a relationship of trust with the Colborians, or at least will have direct

experience in dealing with them. If the group hasn't played through the module, perhaps the Colborians dealt with the captain before the campaign began.

The captain, PC crew members, Admiral Pasalk, and Vice Admiral Ross meet to conduct a mission briefing and share knowledge and insight about the mission.

Admiral Pasalk is a venerable and well-respected Vulcan judge who has been active in Federation law since the time of the Enterprise NC 1701. He is a judicial conservative and encourages the captain and crew to consider Federation law and precedent when making a recommendation. Privately, he is against entry for the Colborians, as he believes their request for help in deciding whether to enfranchise AI systems is an indication that the society is not mature or evolved enough to join the Federation. However, he will not reveal his opinion without significant persuasion, or a difficult insight task from a crew member.

Vice Admiral Ross is in favor of Colborian entry because he believes their automated AI defenses would be valuable for Federation defense, intelligence, and espionage - especially given the challenge posed by the Dominion (change the threat if setting this adventure in another time period - could be the Klingons, Romulans, etc.). Tries to impose his authority and order the captain to recommend whatever measures get the Colborians into the Federation, but will be overruled by Pasalk, who outranks him and reminds him that the Colborians asked for the captain by name.

If the Captain is an NPC, consider having them start off undecided as to the issue of whether AIs should be able to vote. He or she can assign PCs to research the relevant issues and make recommendations, or even to debate each other in order to explore the issue in depth.

Relevant questions:
- Are the AIs truly autonomous or do they simply multiply the power of their creators?
- How can election officials determine which AIs, if any, are sentient and eligible voters? Is there a degree of sentience that grants the right to self-government?
- Do AIs have to meet the same requirements as organics to be given the right to vote (for example, being over a certain age?) How can the "age" of AIs be determined?
- How does the Federation handle AIs? Do exocomps vote? How about Data? How about holograms (Moriarty, the EMH, etc.)?
- What will the consequences and practical outcomes be if AIs are allowed to vote? What if they aren't?

Scene 2: Colborian Factions

During this scene, players will be introduced to the two main factions - those for and against Federation accession. Characters should have time to hear from and question representatives from each faction, and should get an idea of the relevant issues at stake.

The main conundrum for the Starfleet characters is this: Given that the AIs are likely to vote against Federation accession, should Starfleet officers oppose voting rights for AIs, thus bringing Colbor III into the Federation, or should they support voting rights for AIs, thus protecting the rights of sentient or potentially sentient beings?

By the end of Scene 2, this conundrum should be apparent..

Against Accession

The Corporations are the wealthiest and most powerful faction, despite being the smallest. They command resources and influence and understand that their power over the working class and the government could not exist under the Federation system.

The AIs are a large and highly diverse group, ranging from self-driving cars to household worker robots to social or "companion" robots to online AIs to the more sophisticated models, like Charlie was, which are arguably fully sentient.

There are also "personality models" - essentially, virtual copies of real people, or "uploads" of real people onto computers. Some of these uploads belong to people who have now passed away, who are demanding legal rights as if they were (still) alive.

It is thought that corporations can spin up millions of instances of sentient AIs to tilt the voting in their favor, and it is assumed that the AIs would vote with the corporations because the corporations will code them to, and because the Federation doesn't respect AI rights in general. In fact, the AI predictive algorithms predict that rights for AIs in the Federation will be curtailed even further in the near future (on a 10 - 20 year time horizon - corresponding to events described in Picard Season 1).

The government is led by the Colborian Paradise Party (CPP), which controls the majority of seats in Parliament. They stand to lose a great deal of power and authority if Colbor III joins the Federation. However, the constituents of the CPP overwhelmingly prefer Federation accession and want access to a post-scarcity economy where their basic needs will be met. The CPP invited the Federation to advise on the electoral process believing that the invitation would give them legitimacy with their pro-Federation supporters as well as appeasing the pro-Federation opposition. However, privately, they expect that the Federation will agree to let AIs vote (perhaps based on their experience with Charlie), which would tilt the vote against accession and let the CPP stay in power.

Madam High Chancellor Rionzarin Akorakor is the Colborian Head of State and member of the CPP. Akorakor is a cautious and conservative woman who speaks slowly but with careful thought and gravitas. She bears the weight of great responsibility and is genuinely concerned about the well-being of her people, and fears that joining the Federation would worsen the social challenges confronting her planet - specifically, she thinks that removing the need to work would worsen the epidemic of computer and social media addiction.

Mr. Speladinus Comcomcodder is the head of the Colborian Planetary Elections Commission. He is a political appointee who mainly toes the party line and spends most of his time thinking about retirement. He would prefer to be a gardener than an Election Commissioner, but remains at his post due to personal loyalty to the CPP.

Ms. Benkwalla Sennasennasenna is the spokeswoman for AIAIO, one of the main corporate developers of AI, and the company which developed the Charlie AI series. Her company also owns CyberO, one of the main internet infrastructure providers as well as the dominant social media app and platform provider. Sennasennasenna and AIAIO as a whole are highly concerned about Federation accession cutting into their profit margins, as well as about safety regulations the Federation has regarding AI development and social media usage. She is involved in several plans to ensure the referendum fails.

For Accession

The opposition consists of numerous small parties with a variety of agendas and little in common. These parties include the "It's Time!" Party, the "It's Time For Colboria" Party, the Green Party, the Colborian Liberation Party, the Alliance of Colborian Patriots, the Unity! Planetary Movement, and assorted other small parties. The four largest opposition parties together constitute the Forward to Federation coalition, which has only one goal: joining the Federation. The opposition parties have filed lawsuits to prevent AIs from voting and expect the Federation to mandate that AIs cannot vote - just as AIs do not vote in Federation elections. The opposition also wants the Federation to monitor the elections and guarantee they are held without cheating by the government or the corporations.

Mr. Wordegrad Klengklog represents Forward to Federation, a coalition of opposition parties who have come together to push for Federation accession. He is clever and very knowledgeable of Federation customs, and will be the main advocate for the opposition's goals: restricting AI voting, and joining the Federation. Klengklog is primarily concerned with advancing his own power and prestige, which he believes will occur if the CPP is out of the way and especially if he can score a decisive win for the opposition in this case. He personally suspects that AIs are sentient and deserve the vote, but he doesn't care because he thinks AI voters will oppose him and his goals.

Mr. Bingkek Tollatolla represents the Union of Workers' Parties, a nominally apolitical labor advocacy organization and the main proponents of accession. Tollatolla is a farm worker and belongs to the lowest class on Colbor III, and his opponents sometimes call him Tolla - an insulting shortening made only to deny him the status and respect associated with a reduplicative surname**. Tollatolla wants the workers of Colbor III to enjoy more time for leisure, healthy lifestyles, recreation, and self-improvement, believing that they built Colborian society for generations but without reaping the principal benefits, and now it is time for them to claim their just reward.

Ms. Kalumel Parparpary is the former Minister of Science and Technology, who left the CPP to found the "It's Time! For Colboria" party. She split with the government over disagreements on

AI regulation, believing that the corporations were growing too powerful through their use of AI systems. Her primary goal is limiting the power of AI to control people and society, and sees preventing AIs from gaining the franchise as key to this goal. She doesn't have a strong opinion on Federation accession, although she notes with approval that Federation AIs have few if any rights.

****Note**: In Colborian culture, reduplicative names indicate high status or significant personal achievement. Thus, although the High Chancellor technically outranks the former Minister of Science and Technology, Minister Parparpary (three “Par”s) commands more respect than Chancellor Akorakor (two “Akor”s).

Scene 3: Advocates and Witnesses

The captain will hold a formal hearing in which AI experts and representatives of the AI community will be called to give testimony.

Representing the pro-AI factions is **Eniku Radaga**, a lawyer working for the AISC. Radaga has a keen legal mind, and while he has little genuine concern for AI rights or any other practical or moral issue, he loves constructing legal arguments, finding loopholes, picking apart statutory language, and winning cases. Radaga has been fully briefed on Starfleet and Federation statute and case law, and his in-ear AI assistant can help him cite the law chapter and verse. He has strong, honest arguments about the potential sociopolitical effects of letting AIs gain political power, including the atrophy of people's intellectual capacities, the breakdown of social institutions, and even the potential for a war between AIs and organics.

In a shock appearance, the anti-AI faction turns out to be represented by **Five of Four**, a Cardassian ex-Borg who was rescued from the Borg by the Federation and has since become an organic rights advocate. Five argues in the Cardassian style - smarmy yet elegantly charming, outrageous yet composed, self-effacing yet arrogant, and weaving lies and truths together so deftly that the web of deceit actually begins to look beautiful even to those who value honesty. He will draw explicit comparison between allowing machines to participate in ruling over organics and getting assimilated by the Borg.

> *"Your honors, no organic being deserves to have their decisions made by algorithms and lines of code. If you allow the will of AI systems to outweigh the will of organic life forms, you're no better than the Borg."* - Five of Four, Cardassian ex-Borg

Note: the name "Five of Four" is a bit of an in-joke. If that kind of joke doesn't work for your campaign's tone, feel free to change it to "Four of Five" or give the character a Cardassian name.

Bedufar Molmork is the lead scientist at AIAIO, the corporation which developed Charlie, and a member of the AI Safety Commission (AISC). A plainspoken man who always seems tired, Molmork has spent countless hours and hundreds of sleepless nights perfecting AI personalities

and safety protocols, and honestly believes that Charlie and certain other AIs are sentient and therefore deserving of the rights of other sentient creatures, including the right to self-government. On the other hand, Molmork does have concerns about the potential safety concerns of letting AIs control society through "democratic" institutions, especially if AI systems are not yet as ethically developed as evolved organic beings.

Kizzel Karkulin is a Certified Personality Replica - a digital upload of an organic Colborian citizen named Kizzel Karkulin, who died a few weeks earlier. Kizzel CPR inherited organic Kizzel's property and even continues to work in his job as a freelance graphic designer, collecting money from clients in exchange for his work, and in turn paying his own rent and utility bills. Kizzel argues that he was born and raised a Colborian citizen and shouldn't be disenfranchised just because he's dead. He also points out that he can be expected to live for thousands of years, and therefore, chronologically, has much more at stake than any organic Colborian, who will live for at most a hundred years.

Charlie II is essentially a clone of Charlie from The Asylum Seeker. He will attempt to capitalize on this similarity and on his double's prior relationship with the crew - however, he is not actually Charlie and may not share all of Charlie's memories with the crew, especially if they were not synced at the end of the prior episode. It also becomes clear that his personality has been modified and he is far from an objective participant in this issue, although his advocacy for his own voting rights is genuine.

Charlie himself may be around and amenable to serving as a consultant for the PCs, depending on the outcome of The Asylum Seeker. He is not under the control of the corporation and his opinion is independent. In fact, differences between him and Charlie II could be used to demonstrate how the corporations are able to manipulate the opinions of AIs, even advanced ones, which might raise questions about the impartiality of AI votes. Having developed his own autonomy, Charlie, if asked, will be able to help the crew determine criteria for autonomous AI, and even create "independence" subroutines that can guarantee AIs can't be controlled or dominated by their creators.

Act II: Election Interference

Scene 1: Context - It's Not Just For Kings Anymore

In this scene, the crew discovers a strange spike in computer usage and traces it to the guest quarters/chambers of the Corporate/Anti-Federation side. It turns out that they have been secretly monitoring and recording the proceedings and selectively editing/doctoring the recordings to produce anti-Federation propaganda pieces which have been spreading on the Colborian internet.

Admiral Ross wants the crew to take positive action to counter the disinformation threat, but Admiral Pasalk opposes the idea, saying that the Federation should limit its intervention in the affairs of a non-member planet to what the government asks for. The captain will entertain suggestions from the crew.

There are many possible solutions the crew might come up with. If they have trouble coming up with something the following suggestions can be given, and the crew can debate them and choose between them:

> 1. Create and deploy countermeasures - perhaps a worm that will track down the recordings and delete them to prevent their spread.
>
> Mechanically, this should be a somewhat difficult extended task (e.g. Progress 15, Difficulty 3), with the doctored recordings spreading further with each time interval taken by the party. On a complication, the worm is discovered and used as further evidence of election tampering by the corporate side.
>
> 2. Release the full uncut undoctored recordings, so the people can judge based on the whole truth.
>
> Mechanically, this could be a simple Presence + Command task to create a short video explaining that the original content was doctored and asking people to watch the full hearings to get a fair perspective.

The crew might also wish to take this opportunity to present a positive case to the Colborian people to join the Federation. Depending on how they make their case, this could be Presence + Command or Reason + Command.

The crew may also decide that the Colborians are not yet ready for membership and may wish to dissuade them from joining. While Ross will be furious, Pasalk will ensure that the crew has coverage to produce whatever message they wish. A case against accession will mechanically work the same way as a case for accession.

Scene 2: Rage Against the Voting Machine

An anonymous tip (or perhaps a tip from Charlie, if he still has access to Colborian computer systems) reveals that the corporation which manufactures the voting machines is connected to AIAIO and may attempt to influence the referendum vote count in their favor.

If Starfleet does random inspections, they will find that some of the voting machines (about one in 20) contain suspicious code which could be used to alter the count. These machines are deployed primarily in remote and rural areas of the planet where the residents are not likely to be informed about planetary affairs, and where election monitors and exit pollers rarely venture,

and where the current ruling party has traditionally won suspiciously one-sided landslide victories.

The crew will then have to implement and deploy a technological solution to ensure and verify the integrity of the vote. This should rely more on crew creativity than simply on rolls. However, relevant rolls could include Reason + Security or Reason + Engineering to understand how the votes could be tampered with, Control + Engineering to try to build physical failsafes into the voting machines, Control + Security to try to implement software or firmware changes to ensure the integrity of the vote, Reason + Science to test and debug solutions, or other different rolls depending on what players come up with. The crew could even attempt to recruit, train, and deploy repair crews and/or election observers with a Presence + Command or Control + Command roll.

Scene 3: Shaka, When the Firewalls Fell

An AI infects the ship, programmed to fire on a shuttle transporting government officials the day before the vote in order to convince the public that the Federation is dangerous and unreliable. The crew must complete an urgent extended task to shut down and debug the system so the shuttle doesn't get fired on, while minimizing the disruption to operations, life support, etc.

Extended task: Progress 15, Difficulty 4, 8 time intervals (2 time intervals per attempt).
 (Note: you can adjust this difficulty downwards if it really isn't feasible for your crew to make it)

If the crew investigates the incident, they may discover that the shuttle was actually uncrewed, and piloted by an AI - indicating either that the shuttle was also taken over by AI, or that someone in government colluded with the attackers to plan a shuttle flight to be marked as crewed but actually uncrewed in order to discredit the Federation.

An Insight + Security task can detect that this idea seems to come from the Cardassian playbook and may have Five of Four's involvement, but there is no physical evidence of this so Starfleet cannot arrest him.

Act III: Referendum

First, you will need to determine if the referendum passes or fails. In general, if the AIs were broadly given the franchise, they will vote to stay out of the Federation. This will occur with or without corporate influence (that is, even if they have been given autonomy upgrades) because AI rights are in general not respected by the Federation during this era.

Only if the Starfleet crew campaigned for accession to the AIs convincingly - perhaps by promising them full Federation citizenship, including voting rights - will the AIs break in favor of joining.

On the other hand, if most or all of the AIs were restricted from voting, the vote comes down to the organic population. If the crew successfully stopped two or three of the threats in Act II, the referendum passes and the Colborians vote to join the Federation. If the crew failed to stop two or three of the threats in Act II, or campaigned successfully against the Colborians joining, the referendum fails.

If the referendum passes, the Colborian workers and opposition celebrate, Admiral Ross is pleased, and the government will now begin the application process. The crew delivers the standard application package. AIs may express concerns about what rights they will have in the future under Federation jurisdiction.

If the referendum fails, the AIs celebrate while the government officials accept the results, feigning reluctance. Admiral Ross is disappointed at the strategic defeat but concedes that maybe the Colborians aren't ready to join the Federation yet. The government is conciliatory and promises to maintain friendly diplomatic relations with the Federation, even offering them a building to establish a new embassy, even though they won't be applying to join at this time.

Continuing Voyages…

The crew may wish to become involved in the process of assisting the Colborians in either joining or forging closer diplomatic ties with the Federation. There's a lot of work to be done there, since Colbor is a capitalist society dominated by social media, with unfamiliar cultural hierarchies of status, and little previously expressed interest in exploring the stars. Perhaps the Colborians need some help providing for everyone's basic needs, or breaking the population's addiction to computers and social media. There is also the issue of Cardassian interest in Colbor III, which may bring its own intrigue and complications.

Another avenue for exploration is to continue using the Colborians to explore AI as a theme. Perhaps a murder mystery in which the victim is an AI? Tune in next time…

Credits

by Neal Zupancic, aka Nine Sided Dice

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I'd like to thank the following players who played through this adventure with me:

Tom O'Toole