SFIC Designer's Notes

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Where It Came From

Writing the *Star Fleet Intelligence Manual* for FASA's *Star Trek: The Role Playing Game* was perhaps the most intriguing and ultimately satisfying project I have ever worked on. After getting underway, its sheer immensity caught me by surprise; but to paraphrase, "it was a mission I chose to accept" and continue without the slightest reservation.

Where It Came From

The first things I asked myself were not, "What do I include?" but rather, "What *don't* I include?" and "Where will my inspiration come from?" My first resource, curiously enough, was not the *Star Trek* television series or related books or movies. Instead, I turned to my large (and slightly musty) collection of science fiction boardgames and other roleplaying games. These provided me with a lot of raw concepts — and especially gadgets — to re-think and apply to the *Star Trek* universe. As Wilson Mizner said, "When you steal from one author, it's plagiarism; if you steal from many, it's research." I confess I did a fair amount of research.

In addition, I had other excellent sources for ideas. I have always been a mildly devoted fan of James Bond, Simon Templar, John Steed and Emma Peel, the Impossible Missions Force (James Phelps and Co.), Napoleon Solo and April Dancer, Maxwell Smart, and a handful of other television and movie spies and pseudo-spies. More raw data to work from. A select handful of unclassified military operations and intelligence manuals (real ones, these) also helped in spots. Besides, can any true-blue, hard-core fan of one certain television series (based on a group of Army doctors serving in a hospital in Korea) *ever* forget a certain CIA colonel character named Flagg?

The task of writing these manuals was made more complex because of the other FASA *ST:RPG* supplements, adventures, and data books; in particular, *The Triangle Campaign*. A paragraph, sentence, or even a phrase or title somehow relevant to Star Fleet Intelligence Command would appear in an adventure or supplement. Upon seeing each published reference, I felt compelled to make all these scattered concepts and details, written by many different authors, fit as completely as possible within a single coherent structure. The tricky part was in not limiting the structure to just these details. Instead, the whole conglomeration had to be able to grow within certain boundaries — boundaries *I* had to establish. (The SFIC gamemaster and players will ultimately decide whether or not I was successful.)

The TV series itself, unfortunately, was not quite as much help as I had hoped it would be. "The Menagerie" did give an excellent look at some security procedures in use, as well as much insight on encrypted computer carts and subspace transmissions. "Court-Martial" added a few little details on how Star Fleet's bureaucracy works. "Tomorrow Is Yester-day" showed Capt. Kirk committing a little old-fashioned breaking-and-entering at the 20th century USAF SAC base. And of course, "The *Enterprise* Incident" 'turned out' to be

Operation Purloin, making for an interesting time, plus demonstrating the 'need-to-know' principle at work. The movies did add their share, with Project Genesis and some new, officially sanctioned, gadgets including the retinal scan and the security lock on Spock's quarters. And every little bit helped.

Putting It All Together

My first task was to evaluate the problem of Star Fleet Intelligence Command from the player's standpoint. What must each player know to act out a successful Intelligence Officer character in *Star Trek's* time? The character generation system, of course. Standard operating procedures. The player acting as an SFIC agent will not know the ins and outs of SFIC, just as the player acting as an Engineering Officer does not know the internal structure of a warp nacelle. Clearly, the group has to be briefed on certain facts their *characters* would know without a second thought.

Then there is equipment, just enough assorted goodies to get things done without totally destroying the fun of the game itself. Actually, the equipment section could have been two or three times its current size, but too many knickknacks and things-that-go-boom-in-the-night would have ruined the game's overall flavor; at least, as I perceive the game. In general, the *Star Trek* universe uses technology, not abuses it. (And when abuses do occur, *watch out!*) Then add in the history, and famous missions from the past to rally around, giving the players a real 'feel' for their Command. Yup. That just about oughta do it.

The gamemaster, in turn, would need to know the names of senior personnel in the Star Fleet Intelligence Command — dry reading, perhaps, but indispensable — some current ongoing operations and front organizations, base locations, and other 'fixed' details on which to set a campaign. These are the little things that take time to create, and need to be included at the beginning, because 1) their existence should be established 'officially', and 2) their presence gives more tangible substance to the Intelligence side of Star Fleet Command.

After all, the principle of 'suspension of disbelief' enters in here somewhere. This concept allows the 'fantasy' or unreality of a situation to be ignored, and permits a situation to be accepted as real, more or less. The future universe according to Roddenberry would have good internal consistency and believability (despite occasional discrepancies between television scripts). This suspension of disbelief is due partly to the overall attention to detail and the efforts to re-create everyday life during that time (more so in the books than on television).

By having base locations and similar information provided, the gamemaster and players should not have the feeling of having just entered a vacuum. Some groundwork has been laid; otherwise, the room for inconsistencies and gray areas would have been enormous, possible leaving any gamemaster floundering. In such a situation, players might be unable to suspend their disbelief toward the entire concept of a Star Fleet Intelligence Command.

Final Thoughts — For Now

As complete as I have tried to make these manuals, I'm positive they will not be "the last word" on SFIC. With both a fifth *Star Trek* motion picture and a new *Star Trek* television series in the works (and all that implies), the Star Fleet Intelligence Command will have to expand and adapt accord-

ingly. I feel confident, though, that there will always be a niche for intelligence agents in a *Star Trek* universe.

Speaking of confidence...if the world were perfect, writers would never make mistakes, editors would never need their blue pencils, and typos would never get into print. But we all have our little delusions, even if they aren't of being a tin-plated dictator. This is just my way of saying an article of SFIC errata will probably appear in a future issue of STARDATE.

Finally, I am truly grateful to FASA Corporation, and all the authors, designers, and Wise People whose ideas I borrowed, adapted, reconceived, or extracted. I hope you enjoy "...Spies, the final frontier." May all your missions be survivable.