

Speed-Trek

A Character Creation Variant for *Star Trek: The Role Playing Game*

by Bob Portnell

Problem:

Character creation in *Star Trek: The Role Playing Game* (FASA second edition, 1983) typically involves upwards of 50 die rolls (and more if the character has the high INT score). This turns the process into a lengthy chore, particularly given the size of the available skill list and its sometimes-hair-fine distinctions.

Solution 1: Eliminate All Rolls For Skill Improvement.

This is the easy and obvious part. With 40-60 rolls *per character* just for skill numbers, and with most players eagerly pouring them into the key skills for the character's expected role, the laws of averages may safely be invoked. Whenever a die roll to improve a skill value is called for, assume a result of 5. This has the advantage of keeping all the skill values in results divisible by 5, making adding and subtracting modifiers easier. This also makes the recordkeeping during creation a snap – use a tally mark to indicate each 5-point improvement. Update the total for each skill only once, when the character is finished. This all lets the player focus on the important part: the *decision* of where the improvements should be assigned, and not on the silly number crunching.

Solution 2: Merge “System Operation” and “Technology” skills into a single functional skill.

While our mechanically engineered world makes the difference between driving a car and fixing a car meaningful, in a solid-state & software world the distinction between

operation and repair would be less substantial. Pushing two buttons to establish standard orbit is little different from pushing two buttons to run a system diagnostic.

The Master Skill List (“Game Operations Manual,” pg. 25) would have the following changes:

- Communication Systems Operation & Communication Systems Technology would become *Communication Systems* skill
- Computer Operation and Computer Technology would merge into *Computer Systems* skill.
- Deflector Shield Operation and Deflector Shield Technology would combine into *Deflector Shield Systems* skill.
- Shuttlecraft Pilot and Shuttlecraft Systems Technology would become *Shuttlecraft Systems* skill.
- Small Equipment Systems Operation and Small Equipment Systems Technology would fuse into *Small Equipment Systems*.
- Starship Weaponry Operation and Starship Weaponry Technology would combine to become *Starship Weaponry Systems*.
- Lastly, Transporter Operational Procedures and Transporter Systems Technology would merge into *Transporter Systems*.

This scheme, particularly for Computer Systems, may raise some clouds of protest. “Surely using a computer and designing one are not the same!” Even so. The separation of practical vs. theoretical, or usage vs. repair, or Operations vs. Technology, can be restored by permitting the character to declare a “specialty” if they so choose. For example, a declaration of

“Computer Systems (Technology)” specialization would give the character a +10 to any activity involving repairing or designing computer systems... however, that same character would have a –10 to any roll required for a computer operation task. The specialization would be indicated in words or with a checkmark on the Data Record ... the number logged would always be the baseline rating as developed during character creation. Once selected, a specialty should not be changed.

Speaking of character creation: When the rules assign values to both “Operation” and “Technology” skills, the character should use the higher of the two, *even if the assignment occurs in different steps*. For example, Communication & Damage Control branch school offers both Comm. Systems Op. (40) and Comm. Systems Tech. (10). The character would take a 40 on his (merged) Comm. Systems skill. The Academy curriculum offers a 20 in Computer Operation; later, Engineering branch school gives a 10 in Computer

Technology. The engineer-in-training would keep the 20 for his Computer Systems skill (and always has the option to declare it “specialized” for technology at some future point).

Solution 3: Jettison the Service Experience.

In the interest of minimizing rolls, we can leave the details of where served and how well to the player’s creativity and focus only on how long the character is “out in the field.” Skip over Cadet Cruise Assignment. Determine the number of tours as usual ... and then multiply that by 2.5 years, the average length of a tour. Ignore the Tour Assignments. (Well, don’t ignore them. Write them yourself!) In Post-Academy Skill Advancement, give 1 skill for every 2 years of service (as usual), and a bonus skill for every 5 years of service (to make up for possible bonus skills not awarded when we declined to detail the tours).

These changes bring the number of die rolls down from dozens to 9! That isn’t just faster; it also makes the character less random and more in tune with the player’s vision. Down the road, it makes using the character more pleasant because the skill list is easier to read and the skill values are easier to work with.

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