Khitomer Conference 2021

Size Doesn't Matter - It's How You Use it That Counts

Host: Amethyst (Pegasus Fleet)

Room Two · Session 7

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:00:47 PM

Welcome to Khitomer! I hope y'all are enjoying all the panels you've seen so far! My name is Amethyst. This is my second Khitomer conference, my second year as a Panelist here, and my first year helping on the hosting side of the event. I've been simming for over 20 years and have had a variety of positions. Right now I am the Pegasus Fleet Chief of Fleet Operations and Commanding Officer of the USS Astraea.

Welcome to my Panel! Size doesn't matter, it's how you use it that counts!

"Supersize me!"

"Go Big or Go Home!"

"Dream Big!"

"Bigger is Always better!"

Everywhere you look there is something telling us that size matters and size is synonymous with success. This is a notion that I see a lot of Commanding Officers struggle with. The fear of failure or inadequacy because they don't have enough players or don't have players in every department.

Far too often the focus or the emphasis is on being bigger.

Having more players.

Having more posts.

Having more awards.

The metric for perceived success is being driven by a number, by size

I want to let you in on a secret.

Size. Does. Not. Matter!

It's how you use it that counts.

There are advantages on both sides of the coin. Obviously, with more players, you are more likely to have higher post counts and more people actively writing, but more players is also often synonymous with more problems arising from player interactions.

This is something I'm sure everyone is familiar with and has experienced at some point in time.

[OF] Capt. Phoenix Lalor 2/20/2021, 4:04:02 PM

Yup

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:04:19 PM

There's a saying... you can't please everyone

[OF] Capt. Phoenix Lalor 2/20/2021, 4:04:27 PM

True

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:04:30 PM

and the more players you have, the more you need to peace keep, balance and please

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:04:33 PM

Whether it be drama within the crew or just by one ornery crewer... a pain in the arse

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:04:42 PM

Indeed

Something else I've personally noticed is that games with larger numbers of players are more likely to develop player apathy. "I don't need to stress about posting too much, there's plenty of other people who'll write."

If you've ever encountered player apathy, you'll know it can be highly contagious and once you have a few players less inclined to write, it starts to cause general discontent which can affect the overall community in a negative way.

How many times have you been stuck with a post or seen a mission start to stall because a player just suddenly stops posting?

[OF] Capt. Phoenix Lalor 2/20/2021, 4:05:46 PM

Sing it!

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:05:54 PM

Probably my biggest pet peeve

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 4:06:02 PM

way too many times. Enough that it's killed a sim.

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:06:04 PM

Right there right now

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:06:11 PM

And then you feel stuck and it sucks the enjoyment out of it for you as well

[OF] Emu - Fawkes/Loki/Acad 2/20/2021, 4:06:14 PM

Personally look for smaller ships (both in size of the hull as well as the size of the crew). Just feel that I fare better. My main game has a maximum limit of 16 crew members, due to the class and the fact that it's a Civvie freighter.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:06:17 PM

And then having a hard time moving on because I've not wanted to act FOR that person

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:06:20 PM

apathy is contagious!

[OF] Capt. Phoenix Lalor 2/20/2021, 4:06:28 PM

25 players....

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:06:50 PM

There is a lot that can be said for a smaller community of writers that I think firmly outweigh the negative of fewer posts. Smaller communities foster a sense of intimacy. Now, to clarify, I don't mean it in a *Let's all go write behind closed doors* but in a general closeness kind of way.

Smaller crews are more likely to develop friendships, bonds and build a stronger sense of community. These are the bonds and friendships that make people want to write and want to stay.

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:07:28 PM

6 players now...hurts the same.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:08:35 PM

A strong misconception that many CO's have is the notion that not having a player in every department will cause their game to suffer.

I've seen CO's sit and recruit and recruit and recruit trying to fill every department before they start out or start a mission.

In those cases, from what I've seen happening with CO's that make that choice, things quickly become stagnant. Players get bored and leave, so the recruiting becomes perpetual.

This is where the Non-Player Characters can come into play. As the members come to write with each other and get to know each other, some will also desire to branch out, to give themselves more avenues to interact with one another.

Having an NPC policy does encourage even the smaller member roster to keep producing quality writing without burning out on a single character, plus it will also give you the flexibility to have that diplomat that usually is sitting down in the background twiddling her thumbs to come to the forefront when her time is needed.

The use of NPC's also helps the CO be more active and involved with their crew. One of the questions I regularly come across from CO's is that they have 'nothing to do' IC. The Captain doesn't get to do the fun stuff, like going on away teams or getting into shoot outs with aliens in the corridor. They're on the bridge being all responsible. A good NPC not only keeps you actively involved in the mission, but it also gives you other ways to have fun with your crew without airs of rank muddying the interaction.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:12:30 PM

I agree. I have a starbase sim, and I've always tried to have a generous NPC policy. Stations are big, and having a crew that's too spread out can make it challenging at times to get everyone involved. But having lots of NPCs means that players can be in more than one place at a time.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:13:00 PM

An Akira class starship has a total crew complement of 504 persons. NO sim is going to have that many players.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:13:27 PM

That's soooo true, no matter how much we sometimes wish!

But it'd bog down too fast

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:13:37 PM

And I mean, seriously... NGL... if some CO managed to pull it off, I'd like to see how they maintain control!

The Doctor 2/20/2021, 4:14:25 PM

I've got a heavily medical based sim. (Think MASH, but Star Trek.) I'm finding that everyone wants to be a doctor or nurse, which is fine with me as the missions are going to be heavily medical. I needed an engineer for this mission, so I created an NPC.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:14:40 PM

Exactly!

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:14:46 PM

I think that's a great use of an NPC.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:14:53 PM

Another benefit to NPCs in a game is that they can be considered 'expendable', whether in terms of if you need to sacrifice one to a situation or you find a new player that wants to take a position that is temporarily filled by an NPC.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:14:56 PM

And Engineering, Science and Security I've found can handle more NPCs than people can imagine!

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:15:47 PM

For the first season of TNG, the Enterprise chief engineer was not a main character. There were at least three characters that seemed to fill the role before they decided to give the job to LaForge for season two.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:16:19 PM

Who was in Sciences on Voyager before Seven joined the cast?

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:16:56 PM

Oh, that was... uh... you know. That one person?

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:17:04 PM

Most Science specialities can even be delegated out to Engineering or Medical characters as well. Think about what we saw on the TV shows and in the movies. The core crew involved primary operational departments with others filled in 'where needed'.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:17:58 PM

After all, you can have medical people know more about the biosciences while some of the others, like astrophysics could actually be seen as an engineering area, really roundabout way, but it could be!

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:18:03 PM

Thats why I make use of the secondary position for larger ships. So I know that they also have skills elsewhere.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:18:18 PM

Similar question, but who was the chief science officer on the Enterprise D?

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:18:32 PM

Can't think of one

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:18:36 PM

There was the one that Picard had the bit of a thing with once... wasn't there?

The Doctor 2/20/2021, 4:19:02 PM

She was a stellar cartographer.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:19:04 PM

Yeah, though I don't know if there was anyone who was really the "chief". Most of the time, Data filled that role.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:19:08 PM

See, sharing all my impressive Trek knowledge here!

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 4:19:27 PM

there's an argument that no one really had a chief science officer that wasn't Jadzia or Seven.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:19:46 PM

Well, besides Spock and Burnham.

[22] greenfelt 2/20/2021, 4:19:47 PM

Technically Harry Kim.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 4:19:52 PM

...

[22] greenfelt 2/20/2021, 4:19:54 PM

Since Ops is a "filler" for Science.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:19:56 PM

Wasn't Harry Operations?

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 4:20:00 PM

I tend to forget Spock wasn't Ops < <

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:20:01 PM

Well, there you go. LOL

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:20:02 PM

Harry Kim was operations. So he was their Data.

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 4:20:08 PM

Samantha Wildman (Naomi's mother) was a science person on Voyager

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:20:22 PM

But even beyond that, look at some of the other positions we saw played. I mean... Tom Paris for example... can you imagine how boring Voyager would be if all Tom did was fly the damn ship?

[22] greenfelt 2/20/2021, 4:20:26 PM

The only reason why Operations was created was because screentests of Data in a blue uniform did not go well.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:20:59 PM

For Sciences, the biggest problem is for someone to be TRULY qualified, they're going to be a specialist in one or maybe two areas, a 'generalist' science officer isn't going to really know a heck of alot about everything

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:21:34 PM

I did not know that, but that's actually good to know. We've been struggling for 35 years to figure out what Operations does, and it turns out it's that they're science but wearing gold.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 4:21:42 PM

never knew this

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 4:21:53 PM

The other one that's interesting is how many different ways we've come up with to say, "These are the people who shoot things and make things go boom..."

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:22:07 PM

Well, Operations also is supposed to handle the information systems on the ship rather than engineering

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:22:12 PM

There you go! Everyone learned something from my panel. Thanks @greenfelt \



[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 4:22:32 PM

I think of ops as the master task scheduling guy.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:22:34 PM

they're the logistics command of the Fleet, supply officers writ large

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 4:22:43 PM

yeah, I made a generalist science officer, since a lot of what I intended to grow the character into was administration of the department, which requires.. administrative skills.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:22:44 PM

Arguably you could claim that engineering is a subset of operations, but that's not what this panel is about.

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 4:22:53 PM

I think @Amethyst's point is that there's been crossover in the show, which means we shouldn't be afraid to show crossover on our sims.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 4:22:54 PM

The sim never really got far enough for me to do that with the character.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:23:01 PM

Think tactically! To make a smaller crew size work you should be focus on what you're recruiting for as well. Generally speaking, of all the departments in a game (Star Trek in this example, though other genres can usually identify their needs better), aside from the Commanding Officer position, the major positions needing filled are in Security/Tactical, Medical and Engineering.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 4:23:06 PM

yeah, agreed, crossover is fine if it makes logical sense.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:23:31 PM

First Officer can be a dual position with another department if necessary/desired. Chief Medical Officer can act as a Counselor.

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 4:24:10 PM

Medical can also tie into Science and Ops often gets blended with Engineering.

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:24:15 PM

Morale officer is so underrated.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 4:24:17 PM

I've had my captain moonlight as cook 😛



The Doctor 2/20/2021, 4:24:32 PM

Fun fact: my sim has no chief medical officer. The CO is technically also the CMO. It's a complicated sim.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:24:35 PM

Who needs morale? Right?!?!

I've seen other sims like that.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 4:24:48 PM

There's a morale occupation in my RP. Their department color is pink.

"Caretaker Coral" to be precise and they're literally combat space maids.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:25:34 PM

LOL

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 4:25:39 PM

(or butlers)

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:25:54 PM

On a starbase, department heads are tricky since departments are massive. The actual department heads are probably going to be doing a lot of administrative work, while the interesting stuff is happening lower down. It's another thing that I've though about using NPCs for.

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:26:06 PM

In mine the position is called The Spirit and is colored Cream

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:26:17 PM

I think it's important to also keep in mind that a smaller crew doesn't mean a smaller ship size. Again, not that size matters.

A smaller ship has its own unique perspective. For instance, what about an entire sim based out of a Raven (Aerie) Class vessel? Even Department Heads are sharing quarters. It provides a very different element of storytelling that is often overlooked or taken for granted.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:27:08 PM

That would be.... Intriguing... How many people does a Raven-class have? Small enough that the department heads are well... the departments?

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:27:15 PM

pretty much

The concept of this particular sim is a science exploration vessel so there are a few extra science specialists that are NPC'd

but the Chief Medical Officer is the entire medical department.

Same for Security and Engineering

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:28:02 PM

yyeaouch, can you say 'point failure source'?

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:28:11 PM

LOL

The very first mission the entire crew was rendered unconscious.

But, it has a very small crew, deliberately capped out that way, and everyone writes well together and enjoys writing together.

That is what makes it successful.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 4:32:29 PM

The Raven class sim that @Amethyst and I are on has 10 total crewmembers (6 PCs and 4 NPCs). So like she said, medical/counselling is covered by one person. So is Engineering/Ops. My character is the chief helmsman and (per some IC and OOC discussions and arrangements with the GM) kind of gets described as the "chief conn officer and backup everything else," because when he's not being the conn officer he's helping out somewhere else.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:32:48 PM

It works

It suits the crew, it suits the desire to remain small and intimate and it stays true to the concept of the sim.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:33:24 PM

That is awesome!

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 4:33:51 PM

And that's the cool thing about it - it actually does work! Lots of great interacting between the players and their characters.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:33:59 PM

At the same time, having a smaller crew count doesn't mean that you *must* stick with a smaller ship class. You don't *NEED* a large crew to have a bigger vessel. A smaller crew, especially with the aid of a few good NPC's can just as easily maintain an Odyssey Class ship or a Starbase without losing the other benefits that a smaller crew can bring.

That's where, as @AlexM pointed out earlier, the dynamic changes because of the needs of the individual game type

but the overall concept remains the same

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:37:45 PM

A few good NPCs.... And what about the people on the ship other than me? lol

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:37:51 PM

LOL

One challenge that GMs have with both larger and smaller crews is plot involvement and movement. With a smaller crew, it's more common to need the plot movement to remain constant and more rapid to prevent stagnation. Hence, a more active GM to prod them along.

As we talked about earlier, with a larger crew, a plot can stall as everyone waits on that one player out of the flock to add for their single character, frustrating the rest of them. Additionally, the more players, the harder it is to let everyone feel like they're an integral part of each plot or even to find out where their character can fit into it!

An example would be finding a way for a Marine to contribute to a Science mission that can drag on and on, not much fun for the Marine in most cases. The same comes from the reverse, how can a Science crewer participate in an epic fight scene? Coming up with that solution is vital to keeping a player's interest in any given mission.

Think about it from your own perspective? How many times have you been part of a game where what ever is happening is removed from your character and you're left twiddling your thumbs?

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:40:13 PM

The question is more like.... Is there a time when I haven't had a character just twiddling their thumbs? That's why I love NPCs!

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:40:39 PM

LOL

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:40:49 PM

But yeah, I do find it hard when I'm really channelling a character well and there's nothing for them to do

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:41:24 PM

I am a firm believer that there is always something that can be written about

[PF] CorCordale 2/20/2021, 4:41:31 PM

 $\wedge \wedge$

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:41:34 PM

but sometimes continuity can be a pain in the ass

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:41:45 PM

Holodeck waste management is always open.

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 4:41:58 PM

Balancing between individual character development and sim plot can be a challenge, too. It's hard to do character development by yourself all the time...

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:42:05 PM

Exactly!

[22] greenfelt 2/20/2021, 4:42:19 PM

One of the more exciting Lower Decks positions. \bigcirc

The Doctor 2/20/2021, 4:43:17 PM

I decided to write an introvert. I've found it actually painfully easy to do character development in every post simply because she doesn't talk much. There's a LOT of internal monologue.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 4:43:31 PM

Dude, I love playing supply officer NPCs and cooks for my players.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:43:40 PM

Just ignore continuity when that happens 😁

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:43:45 PM

LOL

On the previously mentioned raven class sim, everyone has to take turns at cooking. I'm waiting for my turn. I plan to serve @Gregory coco pops in a large serving bowl with a soup ladle for a spoon.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:45:05 PM

She doesn't cook.

Reminder 2/20/2021, 4:45:08 PM

This is your 15-minute warning

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:45:18 PM

LOL

The Doctor 2/20/2021, 4:45:23 PM

I also like playing barkeeps.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:45:24 PM

That would be EPIC!

The Doctor 2/20/2021, 4:45:39 PM

It's a really fun position to NPC.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 4:46:00 PM

And since my character is a Caitian, when it's his turn to cook he will be pulling a Shrek and serving @Amethyst swamp rat, rotisserie style! We

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:46:07 PM

LOL

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:46:40 PM

Would be better than serving the XO on the Astraea Hassenpfeffer

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:46:46 PM

I do adore me small sims these days.

I am a bit intimidated when it comes to other sims with a large crew.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:47:50 PM

When you're joining after the fact it most certainly can feel intimidating if you have a larger crew size to try and mesh with

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 4:48:35 PM

I did play on a sim with a larger PC crew (usually around 15 or so players). It was fun, but then it was one of those that the GM and AGM did try to keep everyone busy.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:48:37 PM

Especially when the existing crew have been together for a while and you're the 'new person'

I've been on lots of larger sims over the years. I've even CO'd them.

But smaller sims are definitely my preference

they're just so commonly overlooked because so many people think that *bigger is* better

So, we're down to the last 10 minutes or so.... anyone have any final questions or thoughts they want to share on the topic?

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:51:31 PM

What happens if you're in the middle of a mission on a small sim and you get that proverbial new player... How would you go about getting them on the ship

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:51:55 PM

@Mikey- Rozia think outside the box!

[22] greenfelt 2/20/2021, 4:52:07 PM

It depends on the mission for me. I've had some backpost their arrival from before the mission. Others have been sent by shuttle.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:52:14 PM

Just because I have an answer for the question doesn't mean it's not a good question!!

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:52:14 PM

Spiderman him in.

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:52:33 PM

You know you have to keep stuffing me back INSIDE the box more often than not!

[PF] CorCordale 2/20/2021, 4:52:40 PM

Do you know how many radioactive spiders there are in space??

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:53:08 PM

Quite a few I am sure hehe.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:53:38 PM

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 4:54:01 PM

@CorCordale - That sounds like an awesome mission idea!

One of my favorite times simming came from that bigger sim, when there was a side plot that took the XO, CMO, and my character (an ensign in security) to the homeworld of the XO's mother came from (a non-canon species of the AGM's creation) a couple of years after the Dominion War (and where said planet was attacked at one point, but successfully defended), where it turned out that there were factions who conspired with a Starfleet admiral to frame the XO for the Dominion attack, and had him arrested upon arrival (and where the local security forces were looking for the CMO and security guard, who had to find evidence to save the XO with no outside support).

Mikey- Rozia 2/20/2021, 4:54:03 PM

Right... Retrofit ginormous flamethrowers onto the Astraea...

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 4:54:33 PM

One of my earliest characters transferred sims, and I lucked out on having the perfect way to introduce her. She was an intelligence officer, and the sim she was joining was in the middle of a mission on a planet that was involved with the fleet story arc. The away team, including the captain, was just imprisoned. And guess who was undercover and was able to break them out

But admittedly, not all new player situations are that lucky.

[PF] CorCordale 2/20/2021, 4:54:57 PM

Oh I can see it now.

Ichiko: So, your people experimented with animals before they trusted spaceflight... and in addition to the species closer to you so that you could gauge a reaction you could understand, you also sent a literal parade of spiders who not only thrived, but reproduced in space?

Reminder 2/20/2021, 4:55:08 PM

This is your 5-minute warning. Consider moving the conversation to the appropriate overflow room.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:55:14 PM

LOL

So... we're about out of time. I want to thank you for joining me for my panel today, and thanks to @greenfelt we all learned something new! Before we wrap up though, I just want to reiterate the concept of this panel. It's important that we all remember one thing. Size doesn't matter, unless we're talking about a glass of wine. No one likes a small glass of wine.

[PF] CorCordale 2/20/2021, 4:56:42 PM

Unless you're Tinkerbell

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:56:47 PM

And with that, I think I might go get said glass of wine and move over to #overflow-two if we want to keep chatting.

[GEC] Kuna 2/20/2021, 4:57:10 PM

Sunrise's and we can make a day of it. 😉

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:57:25 PM

@Kuna I'm actually tossing up between a rum and coke or a Fruit Tingle



[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 4:58:44 PM

Thanks for hosting this panel!

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 4:59:06 PM

Thanks for listening to me waffle on 😄

It was a bit disjointed and chaotic, but as always, it's been fun.