

Khitomer Conference 2021

How to Play: Intelligence

Host: Kathryn Burke (Theta Fleet)

Room One • Session 8

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:04:34 PM

Hi, everyone! Welcome to How to Play Intelligence Officers - One Approach

I've been simming for twelve years. I've played science officers on intel ships and intel officers on science ships.

This is my view of how to play a good intel officer on a starship or starbase, but it's not the only, or maybe even the best, way to do it. It's one that works for me and those I write with.

There are several kinds of basic intel officers. I'm going to focus on four.

- 1- Research and data mining
- 2- Infiltration to get data
- 3- Presentations and paperwork
- 4- Covert Ops

(Maybe not so much covert ops. lol)

James Bond is not considered intel because he is part of the assassination branch or MI6. That's not how an intel officer in Star Trek should be played. However, there are some sims that like to play this side of the greater intelligence/espionage/dark ops field. This will not be part of the presentation.

In general, that would be up to the CO, but I generally discourage it.

- 1- Research and data mining

The primary purpose of intel is to gather information. Most of the time, it is done by doing research and looking through data. They often have their own sources of intel and classified information that is only for those with the proper clearance or on a "need to know" basis.

Most of your time in intel will involve looking for information to help members of the crew.

You can do research on the computer, dig into other databases, look through old archives, or simply network and talk to people.

Take advantage of the simming environment to work with other players, if you can.

2- Infiltration

Intel officers are trained to go undercover for the purpose of gathering information. They're good at disguise, at getting into computers and locked rooms. They're good at getting out of tight spots. Yes, this may involve a fight, but they generally try to avoid that because they don't want to be noticed.

The primary purpose of infiltration is to gather information. Or, intel. Going undercover or in disguise facilitates that in some cases. Feel free to get other characters involved to help you. They don't have to be intel. Maybe you need an engineer to help get information. Or a scientist. Or even a nurse. For me, it's more fun to write with other people, so I like to get people involved.

As someone in a previous presentation said, "If I'm gonna write solo, I might as well write fanfic."

3- Presentation and paperwork.

Before beginning a new mission, an intel officer can prepare a presentation for the captain and crew to let them know what they'll be getting into for the next mission. This is a good way for a CO to get intel involved in the mission. Give them some basic information and let them present it to the crew at a briefing.

They also do a lot of paperwork, because every time you use intel or let someone see your database, there's paperwork. You have not only the CO, but you have Starfleet Intelligence to report to. While the Captain has a high level of clearance and can know most of what you know, there may be a time when you have to handle information that is not privy to anyone else. Do this only with the approval of the CO.

Because of that paperwork, they can also be involved with encryption.

4- Covert Ops.

Some sims do allow covert ops as part of the general crew, or the sim is entirely intel-based and so doing covert operations is part of their mission parameter. Most sims won't need this except on a rare occasion as part of a greater mission. This should not be routine on an explorer, science, or medical ship.

Make sure your covert ops falls in line with sim rules, with what the GM wants, and with fleet rules (if applicable.)

As an idea, you can do a side mission with another writer or two as part of a covert operation on shore leave.

Some examples of intel characters:

I have an intel officer who specializes in information gathering, archiving, and retrieval. She spends most of her time in an office she calls "The Crypt." She's jokingly referred to as "The Cryptkeeper."

On a previous sim, she not only worked on an intel ship, she helped other operatives. She was basically on call for operatives needing information. To protect herself, if anyone called in who didn't have the proper codes, they'd get the "Intergalactic Tetris Fan Club." She also had Tetris games playing on the unused computer consoles. Most of the time that didn't come into play, but every now and then I could have fun with it. It made her quirky.

It also helped her protect her data.

I have another intel character who grew up as an orphan living on the streets of the major city on her world. She was part of a street gang of children. She learned to do sleight-of-hand and simple magic tricks—street magic. She still likes to keep in practice. She's also a good pickpocket, but she only uses that ability as part of a magic act and never steals from crew.

Both these talents can be used as part of her job.

I have a friend who also likes playing intel. One of his characters is married. He always takes his wife to parties and official functions. She's not intel, but she helps him with his cover and she can socialize while he gathers information. That also gives the player someone else to write with and they do as much better between the two characters as they do actual intel.

Sometimes, you can combine intel with diplomacy. Diplomats can occasionally gather information while at official functions or while meeting with alien Ambassadors.

Those examples may give you ideas on ways to add variety to your intel character.

Also something to remember:

Intel officers are observant, cautious, and should always be aware of their surroundings.

They can be good at reading facial and body language.

They will carry a weapon, if necessary, but they will not use it much. When they do, it's in self-defense, just like any other Starfleet officer. Or like any other civilian.

They may be able to speak other languages. It's not always possible to rely on a UT.

(Universal Translator)

Intel can do covert ops as part of a mission, go in somewhere in disguise to get information on something or someone. This should be coordinated with the Gamester.

This is not Mission: Impossible or James Bond. This is usually a desk job.

However, if you play it right, and if your CO will work with you, you can be the person to pass on information on the mission, find pieces that other people need, and help out in a crisis.

Be the ship's encryption/decryption specialist.

Think outside the box and see what you can do with the character and the department that isn't fighting and explosives. Leave that to the Marines—except in rare circumstances.

I had an intel officer called in by security to help defuse a bomb. But that was just once, and because she wasn't sure how much time they had and didn't want to wait for Marines on the starbase to get to them.

If you're playing on an intel ship, you will have other departments. You'll need someone doing science, engineering, operations, etc. They will have a high clearance as they deal with classified missions, but a good CO should be able to find ways to use each of the departments, even if the missions are all intel-based.

Assets that a CIO has and uses:

Often the intel department will have access to classified information that is only given out on a need-to-know basis. While there can be information that is only for intel, it is not up to the intel officer to decide if it should be given to the captain. That should be discussed beforehand and be part of the mission and under the direction of the CO/Gamemaster. Unless there's an in-character reason why, and approved beforehand.

To clarify, an intel officer, like every other officer on a starship, or whatever type of sim you run, is under the direction of the GM. You can't hijack a post by simply declaring that the information is classified UNLESS that has been pre-arranged with the GM.

Intel officers can have cool gadgets for infiltration missions. Those should be plausible and approved by the CO. Have a conversation about what you want to do with your character and what you want to use.

Some examples can be pens that have tiny bullets, earrings or watches with communicators in them (these can be used for other covert assignments with the crew), etc. The idea is to not go Mary Sue but to have some fun.

Work with the CO, with Engineering, with Science, to come up with gadgets that Intel can use and share.

Just remember that intelligence is just one of several departments. You have your specialities and your assignments like everyone else. Be a team player and find ways to work with others.

For example, one of my intel characters works with the strategic operations officer to gather information.

For COs who want to have intel, remember that you need to find ways to use the officers/department as often as you use the other departments. Let them give presentations during the briefing on a mission. Let them be the ones to tell the crew where they'll be going and let them come up with some interesting information. That information, however, should be approved by the CO so it falls in line with the general mission.

You're not always going to be able to use a department in every mission, but don't leave intel out just because you think it doesn't apply. I was left out of an away team as an intel officer when they were going to a planet hidden in a nebula to look for smugglers. That could definitely have included intel.

In fact, intel was left out of the research for why ships went missing. That was partly because the CO didn't know how intel could be used, and partly because I didn't ask.

A CO can feed the intel player information to bring out or "find."

Intel officers can be part of a general away team with the purpose of finding and gathering information. They can look in computers, search rooms, and talk to people.

aio 2/20/2021, 5:33:38 PM

But how would that work if the storyline the CO has written, doesn't really involve intel at all? Should the CO be trying to add other storylines to include everyone?

[16th] Indrala Xerix 2/20/2021, 5:34:19 PM

^

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:34:38 PM

You can't include everyone in every mission. Don't try. But try to get them into every other or every third mission.

aio 2/20/2021, 5:35:00 PM

But would that not mean you're basically excluding someone every other, or third mission?

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:35:09 PM

Rotate the missions so you can focus on a couple of departments, but not all. Give them secondary things to do, or simply let them do character development for one mission.

As a CO, I like to have something for an away team and something on the ship at the same time. That gives more people a chance to get involved.

aio 2/20/2021, 5:35:37 PM

Not a criticism, just trying to understand it here, it may be the tiredness lol. Does anyone else have thoughts on this? Or other GMs who have experience of this type of scenario?

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:35:54 PM

Or there's something @aio, called character development? How often in Trek did you see every department involved?

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:36:03 PM

Right now, I have two different away teams. One on the planet nad now one on the moon. I have intel on the planet and science on the moon.

Camila 2/20/2021, 5:36:28 PM

Always have something for every department to do, even if it's presenting the information for an away mission. Ignoring a department because you don't have something planned for that department can lead to alienation and a loss of players

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:36:38 PM

Yep. You can't have a good story that gives every character a starring role. Sometimes they're just background.

[PF] CorCordale 2/20/2021, 5:37:05 PM

The odds of a mission NOT needing a briefing is slim.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:37:11 PM

It's only a problem if you rarely use a department.

This is true. It's why I like letting Intel handle data dumps during briefings. They can do that for every mission.

aio 2/20/2021, 5:37:45 PM

Yes, but not every player *wants* to be basically segregated for character development, whenever there's a mission that won't use them.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:37:48 PM

And some will always be used more than others anyway, even among the "regular" departments (think conn, as an example).

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:38:03 PM

Yep.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:38:17 PM

My intel character had a side mission in which the CO let me run with what I wanted to do. We are SB:50 in 16th fleet. With that I took the Marine CO, and a couple of character npcs to capture someone needed to interrogation and stop a potentially dangerous attack.

All whilst the main body of the crew were on another planet at a diplomatic function.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:38:18 PM

And I play a CONN officer. Sometimes there's just no ship flying to do. 😊

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:38:29 PM

Same here.

Cara Letsul 2/20/2021, 5:38:52 PM

Intel can also get involved in different ways without just closeting themselves in their office analyzing data.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:38:55 PM

Be careful not to go overboard and play a Mary Sue who can do anything. It's a lot more fun to play off weaknesses and get into trouble on occasion than to be perfect. Weaknesses make you more relatable and others will want to write with you. It's no fun for me if I have to write alone. I much prefer getting others involved. And in having weaknesses.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:39:33 PM

Having said that, I had been building up that story over a series of posts and including other writers in it so stretch it out and add to the overall story arc

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:39:39 PM

With a conn officer, maybe you can do a side mission with intel and conn flying the shuttle? Get the lesser-played characters involved.

Like all characters, you're part of a group of cooperative storytellers. Cooperate. Be reasonable, and most of all, be polite and kind when dealing with other players. They often have preconceived notions about intel. Feel free to break them by playing a flawed character.

Yes, building something over time can be really interesting.

Finally, playing an intel officer is not like you see in the movies. It's not James Bond, or IMF. You're not locked away in a top-secret part of the ship or station. You don't need special access like in "Get Smart." You're part of the crew. Interact with the

other departments. Find ways to get involved, and talk to your CO for ideas and to get approval. Most of all, be reasonable and have fun.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:41:00 PM

I mentioned earlier in another panel about my current conn officer is on board a Raven-class ship, who's basically the "backup everything else" because there are only 10 total characters on the entire ship, which handles scientific missions. While he's not literally everything else, he backs up areas that he knows a few things about, like ops/engineering and security, and has even had to use his first aid skills a few times.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:41:06 PM

No showing our age @NinjaDuck by referring to "Get Smart"!

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:41:34 PM

Any more questions or comments?

[22] greenfelt 2/20/2021, 5:41:39 PM

I've always believed that characters will only be as involved as their players want them to be. Giving departments opportunity to do something in a mission is one thing; them actually wanting to do it and enjoying it is another.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:41:41 PM

Gregory, that's cool.

aio 2/20/2021, 5:41:44 PM

This is one of the reasons I actively encourage NPCs. Because then in stories where their main isn't required, they have other NPCs to play with.

Means everyone can always post if they want to, whether or not the mission calls for their characters.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:42:34 PM

As a player I look for ways to get my characters involved but that's just me as a person. I do try to have an NPC in each department as a back up as well though

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:43:00 PM

You can't force activity. You can encourage it. You can create opportunities.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:43:27 PM

Absolutely @greenfelt. There's so much more that a character is than a position. Let's face facts, you do your job every day. Some days are good days. Some are bad. Some are exciting. Most are routine. But even in a small law office, like mine, the six

people in the office have conversations about things other than work. This is how you become a collaborative environment.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:43:30 PM

And develop a few reasonable side skills for your PC character. I like to think Starfleet Academy is like many universities today, with a major and a minor. So nobody is "just" one department/position.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:43:45 PM

In the last mission going on within the sim where I am CIO I have focussed on her relationship with another character, not a lot of intel writing but it's been great for the development of her as a person.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:43:49 PM

Plus you also have the "Hobbies" section of the bio as well.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:43:59 PM

THIS!

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 5:44:29 PM

How do you approach trying to fill an intelligence officer position? Do you feel that it's one that you should be looking to fill, or one that you keep open in case you find the right candidate for the position?

Reminder 2/20/2021, 5:45:04 PM

This is your 15-minute warning

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:45:36 PM

Yep. I even had a character once who was involved in a 4 PC character date, which lead to not only the JP of the date itself, but several smaller JPs between each couple before and after the date itself.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:45:46 PM

For intel, it depends on the sim. I actually command three. One is a Galaxy-class explorer with intel. But because I've had trouble with some of the players wanting to run that department, it's NPC-only. I also don't use it very often, so that works.

I have one sim that has no intel at all, as it's a science colony.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:46:15 PM

I do like the ripple effect from good writing

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:47:27 PM

Me, too. Good writing breeds more good writing.

Camila 2/20/2021, 5:47:30 PM

What's the purpose of having the department if A) You're only going to use it every mission or three and B) It's all your NPCS?

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:48:14 PM

What's the purpose of having a helm officer when they maybe get to fly the ship and only follow Captain's directions?

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:48:23 PM

It's NPC because one of my players had an idea for a story arc that would run several missions involving intel. But since it wasn't going to be a regular part of the sim, it was made an NPC department.

Camila 2/20/2021, 5:48:44 PM

@Amanda Rose, that defeats the purpose of the entire discussion

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:48:47 PM

I am probably going to open it up to PCs later this. year. So, it was for a specific purpose, and a specific player.

But in general I agree. If you're not going to use it, don't have it.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:49:04 PM

No, it doesn't. It answers your question with an appropriate question.

Beautiful Night 2/20/2021, 5:49:12 PM

Because intel is what they do, not who they are, and it doesn't stop them having a story outside their day job

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:49:23 PM

^this!

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 5:49:34 PM

I guess my question is more on the player/character fit for intel. In my experience I've found way more people wanting to write James Bond in SPAAAAACE than a character that mostly does mission briefings. But I've played an intel officer that had a mix of disciplines, and she's still one of my favorite characters. On a sim where you want an intel department, is it better to find the right player fit rather than just filling the position and seeing how it works out?

Camila 2/20/2021, 5:49:42 PM

Answering a question with a question isn't an answer.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:50:11 PM

Then look at [@Beautiful Night](#)'s response because that's the answer.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:50:12 PM

I also played on a sim where the Intel department wound up being entirely NPCed (the department and an NPC department head was originally included in the sim because when the sim was starting, another sim in the fleet was shut down at the same time due to inactivity on the part of the CO, and several players, including a junior Intel officer, transferred over). Eventually, after that player (who was the only PC in the department) left, the GM no longer advertised for the department but left it and its NPC head there because he kind of liked the NPC character and found that it was a nice, convenient way for the CO to get intel when needed.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:50:38 PM

[@AlexM](#) YES. Especially with intel. It also helps if you specify that you don't want James Bond in Space. Define what your intel department is and wait for the right fit.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 5:51:11 PM

Intel is probably one of the hardest departments to fill. Everyone wants it, but few have the skill to play it well.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:51:13 PM

See I never even thought of James Bond when I took on the role 😊

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:51:14 PM

I've had problems with my Marines, too. (Yes, I have them.) I've had Marine COs who think all Marines do is brawl in the corridors.

aio 2/20/2021, 5:51:31 PM

Yeah. In the same vein that some people write Marines as angry at everything, Intel people often think everything they do needs to be a secret mission.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:51:32 PM

We had a brief and productive conversation about that, and he spent three years playing a great Marine CO.

So, feel free to tell an applicant that's not how you want intel played. Be specific and see if the player will make the appropriate change. If not, reject the app.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:52:29 PM

That's the problem with almost any position. They want to be the focus. I mean, who doesn't want their character to get attention?

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:52:33 PM

@aio absolutely.

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 5:52:40 PM

Well, "specialty" positions in general are hard to fill because...well, they're specialty type positions. Unless your sim is built around that particular concept, I dare say that it can actually be better to NOT have that particular position available.

aio 2/20/2021, 5:53:08 PM

Yes, but when they do that, and want the focus, those are the ones who don't tend to want character growth. They just want to be the center of attention all the time.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:53:09 PM

But it has become one of my favourite positions to play down to the character I created, the people I write with and the stories we tell. She has a broken relationship with her father, is only 74 years young and still learning in life, find Humans strange people and still I do not find I have a dull moment with her as I create new ways of interacting with the crew so I can develop her more.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:53:14 PM

That falls on the CO to make sure each department gets attention from time to time. And gets to be involved.

Players can also make suggestions to the CO.

@Aranis That's awesome!

aio 2/20/2021, 5:53:51 PM

Same the way people portray Vulcans as just emotionless automatons. Or empath's who just sense everything.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:53:53 PM

And those writers are always problems and not welcome on my ships. 😊

You should have been at my presentation 8 hours ago. 😊

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:54:49 PM

@aio Those players who want all the attention and always want to be the hero don't like being team players. Or don't know how.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:55:03 PM

Exactly.

Reminder 2/20/2021, 5:55:07 PM

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

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:55:43 PM

My characters always have a flaw somewhere. Where is the fun in writing little miss perfect?

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:56:21 PM

@Amanda Rose I was asleep eight hours ago. lol But I know your presentation was awesome as we've talked about it. So, everyone who missed it, read it when it gets posted to the website. 😊

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:56:42 PM

LOL @NinjaDuck. I know you know my presentation. LOL

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:56:51 PM

I like nice but quirky characters. They generally seem to be oddballs, but fun to write.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:56:51 PM

I was talking to @aio

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:57:11 PM

I know. 😊

But I still missed it.

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:57:34 PM

Most of my characters are El Aurians so tend to have something in their past that's screwed them up 😁

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 5:57:35 PM

Thanks for running this panel!

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:57:57 PM

Thank you. And thanks everyone for your comments! I love interaction. 😊

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 5:58:05 PM

I have intel people in my RP too so this was great stuff to think about.

[RPGW] Amanda Rose 2/20/2021, 5:58:28 PM

@NinjaDuck you experience my panel on a first hand basis every day. No worries. 😊

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:58:29 PM

Thank you @NinjaDuck I have enjoyed this. Fantastic panel.

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:58:30 PM



Thank you! 😊 I appreciate it. 😊

[OF] Aranis 2/20/2021, 5:59:18 PM

Should do this more often 😊 A spooks conference where no-one turns up 😊 or do they?

[TF] Kathryn Burke 2/20/2021, 5:59:39 PM

I did a presentation on playing telepaths.

Telepathic spooks. No one shows up, but everyone knows what went on.