

Playing To the Strengths of a Science Officer

StarDuster:

Yay Science

Terrie:

Stand back, She's going to try Science!

Kathryn Burke:

Hi, everyone! I'm Kathryn Burke. I mostly sim in Theta Fleet, but I'm also in 16th and RPGW, along with independent sims. I love science officers. And, as StarDuster said, Yay Science!

Amanda Rose:

She blinded me with science!

Kathryn Burke:

Putting up a level 10 shield for science.

Amanda Rose:

bounces around like Amelix

Kathryn Burke:

Safety first. LOL

Science is one of the most diverse departments in Starfleet. Too often, though, players focus on the mission parameters or the general science from the bridge station, and don't dive into scientific character development.

This presentation builds off the one on using hobbies and interests, because (at least for me) science is a hobby.

Playing a generic science officer generally works, but if you take some time to look into the various fields of science and select a specialty for your character, it can open up more opportunities to develop your character and have fun on your sim.

We can't cover everything, but here are a few examples of what can be done:

(Comments are welcome)

Note to Amanda Rose: Yes, we must address Amelix in this presentation.

Kathryn Burke:

A botanist (whether PC or NPC) can design an arboretum to give the crew a place to go during their off-duty hours. Starbases are especially good for this and can lead to a lot of creativity.

@Kathryn Burke - Note to Amanda Rose: Yes, we must address Amelix in this presentation.

Amanda Rose:

YAY

Kathryn Burke:

One starbase I know of has a river running through one level of the starbase with riverboats, a Riverwalk, small cafes and an elaborate garden. The arboretum is ten decks so they have plenty of room for experimentation. Special events happen there on a regular basis.

One entire mission was devoted to the opening of their "Tivoli Gardens."

Another option is to use holographic technology to add a bit of flair. I've put a hologram of a Mayan pyramid in a corner of an arboretum. The room was two decks high. In front of the hologram was a small entryway leading to stone steps and an observation platform overlooking the arboretum. The hologram made it look like the pyramid led off to an ancient Mayan city.

Botanists can select the flowers they grow and why. Are there trees? What will do well in the space provided? Is there a section for herbs and medicinal plants? Share the area with the cook or doctor. Get other characters involved.

I'm on a sim with one science officer who uses flowers and plants with care. He knows the symbolism of the colors and the flowers and makes sure there's always a secondary meaning to what he grows--or gives.

The character is also a little...obsessed with odd plant mutations. There was a delightful post where he created a plant that attacked people. He was crestfallen when he had to use weed killer to get rid of it.

Terrie:

Whoops

Kathryn Burke:

And, as any good simmer, the player usually gets others to write with him and get involved in his mad schemes.?

Amanda Rose:

Percy...rolls eyes as Amanda Rose

Kathryn Burke:

Indeed. He got in trouble for it with the XO, but it was a lot of fun.

If you prefer astronomy and physics, spend some time in Astrometrics. You can use a 3D mapping program for displays, or for helping with briefings on where the ship is going next. Having a virtual map will help with explaining a nebula, a new colony, or some anomaly. You also get passive data from the long-range sensors to help with mapping.

As a science officer, I've been called on to give visual presentations. Work with the CO so he/she/they can integrate the science into a briefing.

You can have a lot of fun with the passive scans and long-range sensors from Astrometrics. It even gets stellar data from relay buoys.

You can use that to send something to a buoy as well. Not often, but there are occasions when you need to pass on some data.

If you want to do planetary science, use it on the next away team to add something interesting to the topography, weather, or geography. No planet is always sunny. Look up the clouds that indicate a storm is coming, or what plants grow in specific climates. That will let you add to a short description of the area you visit on the planet.

You can also use that information to add something interesting to the away team. Is there a mountain? Caves? A swamp? How will that affect what the away teams see—or the trouble you can cause.

No away team should go smoothly. You can create little hiccups. Maybe the team is looking for something and runs into a swamp. Or a forest. What can you have the team find there?

Always work with the command team and get approval. If they like your ideas, they'll be more willing to work with you for other missions. And you can do more with science.

With planetary science, you can spread it out to other planets in the system. Again, work with command so they can help facilitate some of your ideas. You may get a no, but COs and game masters like players who suggest ideas.

Is your character a historian? Research the history of the cultures you visit. Talk to the game master about ways you can use your character's knowledge to share information with the captain or crew.

You won't be able to go into detail, but maybe you can come up with a holiday, a custom, some bit of politics. Something to keep the planet you visit from being too generic. Every world, every culture is different, and you can add one or two things that will help it stand apart. Do they dress differently? Maybe your character knows some of this in advance and can help explain it. Again, don't use too much detail or you'll bore people. But, like a good spice, a little bit adds a lot.

Terrie:

Unless the point is to bore people at that moment.

@Terrie - Unless the point is to bore people at that moment.

Amanda Rose:

Amelix: I'm never boring! I flit from topic to topic!

Kathryn Burke:

There are characters...

Terrie:

Sometimes your character just really needs to infodump

Or they'll explode?

Kathryn Burke:

I have an NPC I play from time to time who DOES bore people because he's more interested in the details than what the others need to hear.

That's why he's best as an NPC.

Then again, we've all seen show with arrogant, know-it-all scientists. A little goes a long way.

Terrie:

Some characters are the spice, not the main dish

@Terrie - Or they'll explode?

Amanda Rose:

Amelix; Scientifically I don't think that's possible but I should be interested in seeing it, if it is.

@Terrie - Some characters are the spice, not the main dish?

Kathryn Burke:

Definitely!

But it can be fun to play those characters.

@Terrie - Some characters are the spice, not the main dish?

StarDuster:

Stuff an apple in my mouth and call me main dish.

Kathryn Burke:

Well, with the proper application of C4, someone could explode...

Terrie:

Barclay is a great example of a spice character.

Kathryn Burke:

He is! You love him, in small doses.

A chemist will often be used to analyze a sample from an away team, or an unusual substance. Maybe your character studies spatial anomalies. Even an entomologist can be handy on an away team.

Terrie:

(Chemists might explode. Just saying)

@Kathryn Burke - Well, with the proper application of C4, someone could explode...

Amanda Rose:

Amelix: But that's not from the information!

Yuuki:

Interestingly, in the early days of Star Army, Science and Medical were the same profession.

so, a player kind of had to know both roles

Kathryn Burke:

I have an NPC who is an entomologist. The ship has gone to a planet where the colony has been hit by an ion storm. The insects are gone, and the entomologist is looking to see if they've hidden, have gone to another part of the planet, or need to be imported. It's not a major plot point, but it adds to the problem when the colonists try to grow crops.

I totally fail at playing a medical officer.

But I do have a forensic anthropologist.

There are dozens of fields to choose from. Pick something that interests you and learn a bit about it. It's much better if you have an interest and a bit of understanding to write intelligently.

Amanda Rose:

I bet you could do medical. You just need practice at it. Then again, it is a cross between science and engineering where you have to do some medical babble.

Terrie:

immediate post-prandial upper-abdominal distension

Kathryn Burke:

Taking a side trip to Amelix... She is a science officer who can't hold still and tries to do a dozen things at once. It's an unusual character, but she's funny and she will often try to solve everything.

Yuuki:

My first character was a medic, but I was a qualified EMT at the time. She's Starship Operations now that she went to officer school though

@Terrie - immediate post-prandial upper-abdominal distension

Kathryn Burke:

That was such a brilliant line! And one of my favorite Trek movies.

@Kathryn Burke - Taking a side trip to Amelix... She is a science officer who can't hold still and tries to do a dozen things at once. It's an unusual character, but she's funny and she will often try to solve everything.

Amanda Rose:

Amelix is, um, one of my more unique science officers/creations on so many levels.

@Kathryn Burke - That was such a brilliant line! And one of my favorite Trek movies.

Yuuki:

I just got d

Kathryn Burke:

Don't go into too much:35 PM]? detail as most of the crew won't know what you're talking about, but learn enough to sound knowledgeable. Find some of the more common words for that specialty. Know someone in that field? Ask them questions.

Terrie:

I'm thinking of that one XKCD comic now

Kathryn Burke:

I'm a writer outside of simming. One of the things we're often told is that if we want to get information on a specific field, invite someone who works in that field to lunch. Tell them you want to hear about what they do. They love to be asked questions.

If you want, ask a scientist to lunch and spend an hour listening to them talk about their job.

Terrie - I'm thinking of that one XKCD comic now

Terrie:

<https://xkcd.com/2501/?xkcd: Average Familiarity>

How could anyone consider themselves a well-rounded adult without a basic understanding of silicate geochemistry? Silicates are everywhere! It's hard to throw a rock without throwing one!

Kathryn Burke:

Or read a YA book on the subject. You don't get the deep science, but you do get some general information.

Charles Star:

Random observation: When I first started simming in the early 2000s, it seemed like everyone wanted to be the Science Officer (besides CO and XO, of course). Not as much these days.

Kathryn Burke:

That's true.

I personally favor archaeology, anthropology, and history, so most of my science officers have an expertise in these areas. I've found dozens of ways to add a bit of archaeology to a mission, or to shore leave. Sometimes the CO will add something for me to explore and I always bring others with me. I much prefer writing with someone else.

The other player doesn't have to be a scientist. One of my characters loves caves. She often explores them with a Marine, who generally helps her get out of the trouble she finds. Sometimes, the other player will help with ideas that give both characters some trouble. The point is to have fun.

@Kathryn Burke - I personally favor archaeology, anthropology, and history, so most of my science officers have an expertise in these areas. I've found dozens of ways to add a bit of archaeology to a mission, or to shore leave. Sometimes the CO will add something for me to explore and I always bring others with me. I much prefer writing with someone else.

Yuuki:

I have a character whose background is Anthropology, but she was an Intel Officer before retirement (edited)

Kathryn Burke:

That could be an interesting combination.

The character could have some very interesting factoids about a culture.

Amanda Rose:

Back to Amelix who is a generalist, no specialty, if you're going to do that, you need to know a little about a lot. Part of the reason Amelix works is because of her backstory and being the only Tygarian in Starfleet. She would be untenable as any other generalist.

Kathryn Burke:

As I mentioned in someone else's presentation, I have a science officer who was a competitive swimmer in college. She still swims laps for exercise. She was on an away team exploring what they thought was an uninhabited planet. She noticed something metallic in a river and dove in to see what it was. Scientific curiosity plus a hobby and she ended up getting chewed out by the security officer for taking a risk, but it was definitely worth it.

Here are a few types of science:

Mathematics

Computer Science (also Ops and Engineering)

Theoretical Mathematics

Statistics

Imagine what a statistician could do on a starship...

If nothing else, the Captain would always have stats.

Even if he didn't want them.

@Kathryn Burke - Imagine what a statistician could do on a starship...

StarDuster:

I've done this. I was a pain in the rear.

@Kathryn Burke - Mathematics

Computer Science (also Ops and Engineering)

Theoretical Mathematics

Statistics

Yuuki:

as a computer scientist I can attest we are more closely aligned with theoretical math and other things in science than we are with engineering where we tend to get stuck in universities as is fashionable

Kathryn Burke:

True. But very useful in astrophysics.

Natural Science / Hard Science

Biology Botany

Chemistry
Entomology
Geology
Physics
Zoology

These are the ones you see most often.

Terrie:

(For more options, just check out a major university's listing of science majors)

Kathryn Burke:

The idea is to take the science and project it 400 years into the future. You learn enough for a foundation and build on it with Trek lore--or whatever universe you play in.

Everybody needs a mad scientist at some point.

@Kathryn Burke - Everybody needs a mad scientist at some point.

StarDuster:

Killer Plomeek Plant! (edited)

@Terrie - (For more options, just check out a major university's listing of science majors)

Kathryn Burke:

An excellent idea!

Amanda Rose:

Amelix: You're not referring to me, are you?

@Terrie?(For more options, just check out a major university's listing of science majors)

Amanda Rose:

This is a great idea.

@StarDuster - Killer Plomeek Plant!

Kathryn Burke:

That is what attacked the security officers.

Kathryn Burke:

As a history minor and an archaeology aficionado, this is where I play most:

Social Science / Soft Science

Anthropology

Archaeology

History

Psychology

Sociology

Terrie:

Linguistics, too. Plus, take any of these and slap "xeno" in front of it

Kathryn Burke:

Definitely check out science majors. Look up types of science online. Learn enough to pretend.

@Terrie - Linguistics, too. Plus, take any of these and slap "xeno" in front of it

Kathryn Burke:

Yes! Linguistics and xeno-anything.

Kathryn Burke:

Two URLs I used:

<https://www.infobloom.com/what-are-some-different-types-of-science.htm>

<https://simplicable.com/new/science>

Terrie - Linguistics, too. Plus, take any of these and slap "xeno" in front of it?

StarDuster:

I've seen Xenoexobiology

I'm still wrapping my head around that.

Kathryn Burke:

Just...wow!

Gregory:

Now that's getting creative!

Kathryn Burke:

If nothing else, find something you're interested in. if you don't care about it, you won't write it well. We sim to have fun. So...have fun with science!

Terrie:

Science!

Kathryn Burke:

All the science!

Thank you for your comments, and for attending my presentation.

@Terrie

Linguistics, too. Plus, take any of these and slap "xeno" in front of it

Yuuki:

we stuff those into communications mainly tho

Terrie:

There, that's a better choice

Yuuki:

no Blinding Us With Science

Yuuki:

communications or intel

Terrie:

Linguistics is odd, because it straddles multiple fields

Yuuki:

Linguists are intel in the US military

Terrie:

At my college, it was interdisciplinary between the English department and the Anthro department

Yuuki:

Computer Science and Linguistics are very closely related fields

Kathryn Burke:

Cool.

Yuuki:

all that stuff about context free grammars and all

Terrie:

Study of dialects is very anthro

It's an odd area

Kathryn Burke:

But interesting!