

# Interstellar Diplomacy

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## Introduction

The assembled alien races of the Galactic Union have reached a political crisis moment. If no agreement can be reached in the next Earth hour, an intergalactic war appears inevitable. Thousands of Mark 7 Warpfighter Fluxcraft gather at the borders, ready to strike the moment war is declared. Omnicron Class V Black Hole generators will be utilized to destroy the entire Orion-Cygnus Arm of the galaxy, including this small blue green planet where the final peace talks are being attempted..

As a matter of tradition, you, diplomats of the Interstellar Union, will meet on one of the planets that will be annihilated in the path of devastation. This ensures that you will see the life that will die if you fail to negotiate a peaceful accord. For this meeting, you have come to a planet called Earth and you have taken on the guise of the native semi-sentients. You each appear as human to the local lifeforms and to each other, to avoid panicking the natives.

As is traditional, if they fail to broker a peace, then you will be left on Earth when it is destroyed. This is to provide personal motivation for the cause. If you fail to reach consensus, then you will be among the first casualties of the war. When the planet is annihilated, you will die with it. Unless, of course, you can reach a peaceful agreement between your warring nations. You have been given complete authority to accept or deny any offers made by the other races. Can you use that authority to prevent a galaxy wide war?

This is a game about negotiation between alien races. It can be played as a tabletop game, but you might get more fun out of making it into a larp or semi-larp. You can get up and act out your diplomat's actions, but you can also narrate behavior that is difficult to larp. Each player will portray an alien diplomat, speaking for their race. Each race and each diplomat has a different set of priorities for the situation. Reaching an agreement will be difficult. But if no agreement can be made in the time provided, galaxy wide war will break out, causing untold devastation through the galaxy. Can you broker a peace in time? Will you achieve your personal and political goals?

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## **Logistics:**

This game should work with any number between 2 and 20 players. Two or three players would be a tight, small game and you'd have to ignore some aspects of the game (like internal relationship questions) but you should be able to make it work. For a small game like that, the organizer of the game can probably play along with everyone else. In a larger group, the organizer will have his or her hands full just wrangling the crowd of players, so he or she should probably avoid doubling their work by also playing a diplomat.

With large groups, you'll have to do more marshalling and organizing your forces. You might want to divide into several groups of five or less. My guess is that the sweet spot for the game would be 4-10 players, but you might have a lot of fun with larger or smaller groups.

For a group larger than three, you should have multiple diplomats per alien species. Each sentient group has sent multiple representatives to this meeting to negotiate different aspects of the treaty, but they all work toward more-or-less the same goals. Once you have a headcount for the game, the organizer should decide how many alien factions are involved in the peace talks. Two is simple, three can be interesting. More groups will make discussions more complicated and chaotic, but that could be really fun. Groups don't have to be equal in size: you might have one group be much larger than the others, or have two groups that are large and a single smaller faction caught in the crossfire. Each player will be assigned to one of the various groups, and then you will divide into groups to create the individual races.

If you're doing this in a larplike situation, you can have the factions each have different regions of the larp space as their own space for planning and scheming, and then have envoys go from group to group. Or you could have rooms devoted to different topics: military, economic, social, political, etc. and diplomats move from room to room making deals and having arguments.

You'll need to print and cut the cards at the end of this document. If you're going to have a large game (8+) you may need to print multiple copies of cards to have enough. (Actually, they're not cards at this point, but you might print them and cut out strips of paper and draw those from a cup. That should be easy enough.)

## **Racial Creation**

To create the opposed science fiction factions, you draft cards for aspects of race and culture. Divide into groups for each race. Each player draws two racial aspects and chooses one to be true of their race. Discard the other. The card has an aspect of your alien biology, or your alien culture or some other detail about your people. Discuss with your fellow members of the race what your people are like and how those chosen aspects fit together into a cohesive whole. Can

you explain the apparent contradictions of your race? Once you know what your people are like, decide collectively on what name you call yourselves.

For factions with only one or two players, each player should draw several cards and pick two to be true. If you have factions that are five or more, you should limit the number of racial descriptors to four or five. Have each player draw a single card and discuss among themselves which cards should be true of their race, until the group reaches a consensus on a few cards.

Once you know what your race is like, you establish relationships between players. Arrange your faction into a circle, and have each player draw two relationship question cards. Taking turns around the circle, you will one at a time choose one relationship card and ask the question to the player on your right. (Discard the other relationship question.) They provide an answer, thereby establishing backstory for both your characters. Then they ask you an additional clarifying question about the relationship, which you answer in return. Go around the circle until everyone has a relationship with the player on their left and their right.

Then your race as a whole draws eight (?) demand cards and you collectively narrow it down to five through discussion and consensus. Your race as a group secretly chooses two which are issues that your culture really cares about. The other three demands are diplomatic decoys, which you expect to concede in negotiation in order to get what you really want. But your diplomat might care about the demand, even if the government doesn't. Each player secretly chooses one of these decoys to be an issue that they personally care about and want to see accomplished. (It is important to keep this choice a secret from the other members of your race.)

Place your five demands in the slots for your race sheet. (This would be a good thing to have card sleeves or velcro and cardboard of something. But paperclips would work well enough. Even a stapler would do.) Each race has a set of letters, A, B, C, D, E or F, G, H, I, J or K, L, M, N, O or P, Q, R, S, T or V, W, X, Y, Z. As a race, choose two letter from the opposing side(s) to circle. These will be demands that your government cannot possibly allow. (You don't know what the demands are just yet, but when you learn them, you'll all know that the government strongly opposes those requests.) Then choose one letter secretly to be a demand that you personally are opposed to. Draw a star around that letter. When the opposing race presents their demands, you'll have to decide why you are opposed to that demand personally, even when your government doesn't care.

If you're playing a multi-faction game, you will need to do the same for each block of letters. Have your race pick to letters to oppose, and then you secretly choose a third to oppose.

Once every race is ready, all the races should have an initial meeting. Explain what they would know about your race's history and biology, given your racial traits and list of demands. You each present your basic demands to the other sides and listen to theirs. Each demand has a clarifying detail and a question for the other race to answer. Choose random members of the

opposing side one at a time to ask these questions. Spread out the questions as evenly as possible, so that no player answers two questions until all have answered at least one. If there are three or more factions, then you will also need to spread out your questions across races. Ask one question from each race before doubling up on a single race.

When answering a question, you can (and should) flavor the answer based on secret knowledge like backstory between two PCs or the fact that this is a simple diplomatic decoy your government has no interest in.

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### **Diplomatic Discussion and Debate**

Once your priorities are all set, you have a freeform, open discussion for one hour. During this time, your goal is to negotiate with the other players and get the better end of the deal. The game's organizer probably want to have a large, prominent clock or timer reminding the players how little time remains.

Diplomats are free to make any statements or promises they feel are appropriate. If you establish something important about your own race, you probably should tell other members of your race about it so that they can incorporate it into their roleplaying.

You should have the sheets with each faction's demands posted somewhere prominently. Ideally, you have a cork board and push pins that you can use to designate what demands have been accepted or denied. You can put a pin above the demand to signal it has been granted, or below to show that it is denied, or in the demand to say it is still uncertain.

A majority of a faction's diplomats have to agree to grant or deny a demand. Individual diplomats can make whatever promises they want, but those promises won't have any weight unless they can get their compatriots to agree. (This probably means that factions of one, three, five, etc. will have an easier time making decisions than factions with two, four, six, etc. participants. Arrange your groups accordingly.)

A demand that is granted might be retracted, if the situation changes. Similarly, a demand that has been denied can be granted later after further discussion. You just have to get a majority of diplomats from the faction to agree to the change. What is important is where the demands sit at the end of the hour.

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## Endings and Epilogues

At the end of the hour, negotiations are finished, regardless of whether agreement was reached or not. If no agreement was reached, a terrible war breaks out between the two countries. If some agreement is reached, then each side makes the appropriate concessions.

If no agreement can be reached, then war breaks out. The Earth is destroyed, and all characters die. All the involved civilizations wipe each other out, leading to a great Galactic Dark Age for centuries as interstellar society has to rebuild from the rubble of its devastation. When sentients once again rebuild a galaxy-wide civilization, they will blame you personally for the centuries of despair caused by your inability to make a simple compromise.

### Points:

Assuming an agreement was actually reached, you determine the then narrate an epilogue for your species as a whole and for each individual diplomat. Some factions might have a happy ending and some might not. Consult the score chart below to calculate your final score, which will determine the quality of ending for your race (and your diplomat). All demands are binary propositions: either you got exactly what was listed on the card, or you failed to achieve your goal. Each player should draw a fortune card, and interpret the fortune to narrate an epilogue for their homeland, either positively or negatively depending on how many demands they achieved.

Demand	Fulfilled	Denied
Your faction's demand, really cares	6	-6
Your faction's demand, doesn't care	1	-1
Other race's demand, your race opposes	-5	5
Other race's demand, you don't care	-1	1
<i>Personal goal</i>	7	-7
<i>Other race's demand, you personally oppose</i>	-6	6

Total up your race's score. For now, ignore the bottom two lines for personal goals. If the species has a total above 0, then the race will go on to a happy ending. Draw a racial fortune

and interpret it in a positive fashion. Each player in the faction adds one detail to the epilogue, building on the fortune card and the other player's narrations. If the total was below zero, interpret the card in a negative way, with each player adding a detail. If it is exactly zero, the race's fate is interpreted in a mixed, bittersweet way..

Then each diplomat takes their race's score and adds their personal modifiers (the last two lines of the chart) to get their personal score. Every player draws a personal fortune card and interprets it similarly. If your score afterward is positive, interpret the card in a positive fashion. If you had a negative score, interpret it in a negative way. If you have exactly zero, then get a mixed, bittersweet ending.

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### **Relationship questions:**

Which of our ancient taboos do you violate, much to my dismay?

How were you responsible for me failing to complete my last great project?

Why can't I stand your character, even though we have to work together?

Why would I risk my life to protect your character?

What do I want from you, and why won't you give it to me?

What secret regrets do we share?

Why am I afraid of your character?

What embarrassing nickname did I give you and why?

We are both famous among our people for what noble deed that we never actually performed?

How did I convince you to assist with this diplomatic mission?

What do I owe your character? Why?

What moral or ethical line do you refuse to cross while I freely do so?

What have I done to sabotage your diplomatic career?

-You were sentenced to be exiled from our society. But I instead found you a job in the diplomatic corps. What did you say to me to give you a second chance?

-We recently had a brief romantic affair. Why do I now regret ever sleeping with you?

We are currently in a romantic affair, which is a clear violation of diplomatic protocol. What attracts me to you?

On our last mission together, you convinced me to overstep my power as a diplomat. What promises did I make that I couldn't keep?

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## **Demands**

### **We demand you leave Tau Ceti E.**

Though we have no colony on the planet, Tau Ceti E is of immense religious significance to our people, and according to our ancient laws, the planet must remain pure and untouched by any sentients. Why is your colony of tremendous political importance to your people?

### **We demand that one of your political leaders sacrifice themselves as penance for their past misdeed.**

During a previous encounter, one of you violating our most sacred of taboo, an insult that can only be cleansed with a blood sacrifice. What seemingly minor act that you perform regularly is a tremendously important taboo to our culture?

### **We demand that your construction ships leave the Vega system.**

Our colony there is of no military purpose, but it stands in the way of your interstellar scale construction project. They would have to leave the home in the system for you to complete it. What great project was your race working toward, and why is it so important?

### **We demand you allow the Children of Eshnu ethnic minority to freely leave your borders.**

your government has been mistreating these indigenous people for generations, and they want out from your control. Our race has agreed to house the refugees and form a beneficial union with them. Why can't you allow the Children of Eshnu to leave your government's control?

### **We demand that you withdraw your military vessels from Kepler 62e.**

The fortifications you are constructing in the region are a clear sign of aggression, and we cannot tolerate warships equipped with antihypertriton cannons within four light years of our borders. Why must you keep those military encampments where they are?

### **We demand that you cease construction of the black hole generator superweapon.**

Sure, we have a black hole generator of our own, but we cannot allow any other galactic powers to wield destructive power of that scale. What existential threat do you face that you need the black hole generator to protect against?

**We demand that you share with us the plans for a superintelligent AI that you have created.**

The mental processing and potential instability of the godlike artificial intelligence is too powerful to be in the hands of a single group. Why is the AI too dangerous to share with any other race?

**We demand that you accept responsibility for the death of our Exalted Hierophant and sacrifice the life of your most powerful diplomat in penance.**

The Hierophant died during a previous political summit, leading to the current hostilities, but the assassins have never been caught. We believe that agents of your government were responsible. Who do you blame for her death?

**We demand equal access to the Paradoxographic Oracle of the Antares Cluster.**

The immortal prophet is sacred to both our peoples, but you have denied access to his Moon of Isolation for the last two galactic cycles. What tragedy did we wreak upon your people the last time we followed one of the Oracle's prophecies?

**We demand that you negate all the debts of the fermionic condensate miners.**

The miners are largely members of our race that work at debt-slave wages for your richest corporations. Their meager pay will never repay the cost of their oxygen and water reclamation. What financial catastrophe would befall your people if the debts were forgiven?

**We demand that you give greater political autonomy to the Maelstrom dreamers, the rebel faction of your people.**

Sure, in the past we have armed the rebels when they tried to strike against your government. But if you give them their freedom, then they might not strike at you again. What worse action do you believe they will take against you if given their autonomy?

**We demand that you acknowledge our claims to the Epsilon Eridani star system.**

The star system is devoid of livable planets or valuable resources, but it falls directly on the border of our spheres of power. But each side wants control of it, purely as a matter of political posturing. We landed the first known sentient there a generation ago, claiming it in our name. What prior claim to it do you have that we ignore?

**We demand that you return our captured pilot and experimental spacecraft to us.**

One of our experimental CloakShip recently flew off course and crashed on one of your moons. Though we deny it, it's obvious that the ship was a spy craft, and the pilot was obtaining intelligence on your military capabilities. What terrible punishment is traditional for spies among your race?

**We demand that you identify who in our administration is working as a spy for your government.**

Recent actions by your government seem to indicate that your spies have infiltrated the highest ranks of our government. One of our members must be a mole, feeding classified knowledge back to your government. What alternative explanation do you have for always knowing our next move before we make it?

**We demand that you cancel your alliance with the Void Speakers, our hated enemy.**

We have been in a long cold war with them for generations. Without your assistance, their position would crumble quickly. What enormous benefit do you gain from being their ally?

**We demand that you have your government's top official face our Chief Quasar Warrior in hand to hand combat to the death.**

This would erase a grave dishonor your people did unto us at the Festival of Infinity, two cycles ago. According to our tradition, the only way to clean the stain of insult is with the spilling of blood. How was that incident not your fault?

**We demand that you give us half of all the neutronium mined from the Calvera neutron star.**

The neutronium is highly valuable in high energy computational paraphysics. Before our people grew hostile to each other, we allowed you access to the star in exchange for a portion of the profits. Now we want half of all the material mined. What percentage were you giving us previously?

**We demand that you make reparations for the damage you caused to the Stochastic Citadel during the Entropic Flux Wars.**

The Stochastic Citadel was the greatest of construction projects, a space elevator made out of spun diamond fiber and stretching into the void of space. What military purpose do you claim it served during the war?

**We demand that you give our Lamentation Priests free access to your planets to spread their holy word.**

The Lamentation Priests only wish to bring the divine message of Uluthra the Undying to the unenlightened. The times when our people used the lamentation priests as cover to perpetrate hideous crimes against your race were all isolated incidents, we promise. What atrocities did these lone gunmen commit while disguised themselves as lamentation priests?

**We demand that you stop providing military aid to the rebels on Tarandi V.**

The rebel forces have repeatedly attacked our legitimate peacekeeping forces, when all we want is to bring law and order to the region. By force if necessary. What legitimate grievances do the rebels have against our government?

**We demand that you release the hostages you have captured from our embassy on your home planet.**

When the troubles began, you took the entire embassy staff hostage. We want them back, unharmed. What crimes against your people do they currently stand trial for?

**We demand that you free the political prisoners you currently imprison on Pegasi 1467.**

The majority of these prisoners are peaceful protesters who opposed your government's actions. Your government agreed to free the prisoners and close the prison, but have not done so yet. What terrible thing would happen if you freed the prisoners?

**We demand that you repay the exceedingly large loan that our government loaned to yours to finance your war against the D'rawmm Mindworms.**

We agreed to give you financial backing to defeat a common enemy, but your government has yet to pay down its debt to us. What factor prevents paying back your loan?

## **We demand that your government cease supporting the illegal smuggling of mind altering memory crystals into our star systems.**

These artificial memories are extremely addictive to our people, and considered immoral to our culture. Your government openly opposes the smuggling, but recent reports indicate that they support the trade under the table. Why is the illegal smuggling so important to your people?

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## **Racial Aspects:**

### **Fourth Dimensional**

Our species interacts with spacetime differently than most species. In particular, we do not normally perceive time linearly, as most sentients do. While in human form, for this meeting, we experience time normally, but we still cannot understand verb tenses in any way. Are they talking about the past or the future? We have no idea.

### **Poetic**

In our society, it is impolite to directly state what you mean. All statements are made in the form of metaphor: you must describe an unrelated matter that is analogous to the matter in some way. We therefore always assume that others speaking to us do the same.

### **Literal**

Our race is incapable of understanding metaphor, analogy or idiom. A thing is itself, not some other thing. Why would you describe it as that other thing, when it is clearly not that thing?

### **Color changing**

In our native form, we are covered in scales that change color like a chameleon, in response to our moods. This makes it impossible for us to lie and we do not understand deception in any way.

## **Aquatic**

Our race didn't evolve on land. We are naturally creatures of the sea, and we have great difficulty getting the hang of walking on land. Whenever we want to move around the play area, we should walk awkwardly and slowly, falling over or crawling along the floor.

## **Constructed Race**

We were originally created through genetic engineering to serve another species. We were made to have few emotions to interfere with the master's orders. The master race is long gone, but we are still extremely logical in our decision making. We do not understand emotions in other races.

## **Rodent**

Our race evolved from warren dwelling colonies of small furred creatures that rely on each other for survival. We never think things through logically, but instead simply rely on the emotional response of the group as a whole to guide our actions.

## **Solitary Predators**

Our race is descended from large catlike predators that hunted on their own. Social niceties and friendship are unknown to our culture. We do not care or notice when our behavior offends those around us.

## **Clones**

Our race are all clones of a small number of perfect specimens chosen centuries ago. We can easily tell each other apart, but we are completely unable to tell members of any other species apart.

## **Berserkers**

Our people are a glorious warrior people. We revel in the joy of battle, we honor the bravest among our warriors. We wish to crush our enemies, see them driven before us, and hear the lamentations of their mating partners.

## **Mollusk**

Our natural form is covered in a thick, crystalline shell. If ever danger threatens us, our natural defense is to retreat into hiding. To this day, our species avoids any violence or conflict if it can be avoided in any way. Even the slightest threat will send us running.

## **Boastful**

In our society, it is considered normal to exaggerate your every accomplishment. Everyone is expected to turn their slightest deed into a fantastic tale worthy of praise and glory. Sometimes, you completely fabricate the stories out of thin air. After all, how will your listeners know?

Because of this tendency, we assume that all other people are exaggerating and boasting when they tell tales of their own accomplishments as well.

## **Birdlike**

Our species evolved from feathered scavenger creatures, and we still retain some of the habits of the magpies we came from. We love collecting any shiny objects, and our culture is built on greed. Whoever collects the most valuable resources wins, right?

## **Fragile**

Our race lives a very short time, and dies easily. We have large families to survive, knowing that most of our young will never reach adulthood. Central to our culture is the concept of *Shouganai*, that since fate is inevitable, you shouldn't stress out over the consequences.

## **Crystalline**

Our species is grown from living rock. We live for millenia, and are very slow to act. Central to our culture is the concept of *Zugzwang*, where acting first will cause worse consequences than waiting for the other party to act first. Patience is the highest virtue.

## **Many Eyes**

Our native form is covered in a large number of eyes that see in all parts of the electromagnetic spectrum, as well as other more specialized sensory organs. In our society, what someone tells you counts for nothing. You only trust what you can observe directly yourself.

## **Insectile**

Our species goes through several life stages, and each stage has a very specific role in society. Workers are expected to follow orders without being told why those orders are as they are. In our society, it is considered an insult to ask questions.

## **No Eyes**

Our species lacks eyesight in ranges humans would understand. Consequently, information often has to be transmitted verbally instead of simply showing someone something. In our society, it is considered impolite not to ask dozens of questions until all details of a person's story have been explained.

## **Burrowing**

Our species naturally lives deep under the crust of our planet. Tunnels are hard to dig, so space is always at a premium. We don't have a concept of 'personal space'. In our society, it is considered impolite to stand more than two feet away from someone you are speaking to.

## **Spiked**

Though we currently have taken on human form, our natural shape is covered in protective spikes. In our society, it is considered impolite to stand within ten feet of someone you are speaking to.

## **Bureaucratic**

In our society, it is considered impolite to speak to the person in charge directly: all matters are communicated through their underlings. Important matters will work their way up the chain, while minor matters will be dealt with by minor functionaries. To bring a matter directly to those in charge is to insult their rank, by suggesting that they are unimportant bureaucrats.

## **Direct**

In our society, it is considered rude to address any except the highest ranking person present. Your first task when meeting a group is to determine who is in charge. Addressing their underlings marks you as an underling yourself.

## **Generous**

In our society, all meetings are commemorated with the giving of gifts, which the recipient must accept. Whoever gives the best gift is given the most social prestige.

## **Modest**

In our society, all gifts or compliments offered must be refused by the recipient out of modesty. The winner of any social situation is the one who is the most humble. If ever another person makes a positive statement about you, you must counter it with an even more positive statement about them.

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## **Racial Fortunes**

Your people will expand their territory into unknown lands and discover strange new worlds. What do they discover on an alien world?

Your race will discover an artifact of an ancient civilization and activate it to uncertain results. Is it a miracle device or does it unleash ancient horrors?

Your race will discover a new technology, with unpredictable outcomes. Does the new technology save your race or doom it?

Your race will undergo a major political upheaval. Is the new government benevolent or tyrannical?

Your race will get involved in a major military conflict against a race not present at these talks. Do you conquer gloriously or are you the conquered?

Your race will undertake a massive interstellar construction project. Does it turn into a wonder of the galaxy, or does the cost of its construction collapse your economy?

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## Personal Fortunes

You will be given a new job. What new role do you play?

You will get involved in an unexpected romance. What is your relationship with this other being like?

You will become involved in an lunar business venture. What weird product do you gamble your savings on?

Do you make a fortune or lose a fortune?

You will learn something you didn't know about yourself. What do you discover?

You will find something that had been hidden from you. What has been hidden and who was hiding it?

You will receive credit or blame for something you didn't do.

You will learn a secret. ???

You will join a new religion. Are they enlightened peaceful master, or a suicidal death cult?

You will learn an important moral lesson, possibly through experiencing personal ruin. What is it and how do you come to learn it?

You will anger those around you. Do you quell their anger or incite them to violence?

You will receive a great reward, possibly undeservingly so.

You will confront an old enemy or rival.

Your actions here will have unintended consequences for you at home. What are they?

The actions of another diplomat here will have unexpected consequences for you at home. Whose actions and how do they affect you?

You will be called on to assist a friend in need. What task do they need help with, and how does it turn out?

You will get what you think you want, but it won't turn out the way you expected.

You will get what you needed, but not what you wanted.

You will make a rash decision. What do you act on without thinking, and how does it turn out?

You will change allegiance or motivation. What do you stand for now?

You will travel among the alien races, learning of their strange customs.

Your body will be replaced with an android one

You will make a proverbial deal with the devil. What powerful malevolent force do you ally yourself with? Do you receive the rewards of your sins or do you pay the price for your corruption?

You will eventually leave the diplomat's life. What new life do you choose for yourself, and how does it turn out?