

The Leader of the Pack

*Leadership
abilities in the
STAR FRONTIERS®
game*

by Steven E. Williams

It's a Saturday afternoon, and you and a group of friends are enjoying a STAR FRONTIERS® game. Take a moment to step outside the game and observe your fellow players. Is one known for the ability to crack a joke at just the right time? Does another come alive in a situation involving a no-nonsense decision to accomplish a specific task?

Some players steer a group socially. Others steer a group toward a predetermined goal in the adventure. In real life, these types of behavior have been separated by psychologists into two kinds of leadership: social and task-oriented. This division is drawn in the STAR FRONTIERS game universe as well, and is indicated by the PER/LDR ability pair.

A PER score, or personality score, measures a character's ability to adapt in interpersonal situations. Wit, charm, comeliness, and a sense of humor contribute to a high PER; gravy stains on a shirt and bad breath don't. All of these characteristics — both good and bad — are reflected numerically in a character's PER score.

A great use for PER lies in replacing the Carousing skill that TRAVELLER® game players miss in STAR FRONTIERS games. To accommodate this need, the referee should roll a PER check in any situation in which a PC socializes with an NPC.

For example, consider Rico the Snake, a 20-year-old Human military specialist

(thug) whose PER/LDR score is 30/40. He enters a bar in an unsavory section of the city and tries to make a new friend, upon whom he hopes to unload a hot hovercycle. The referee modifies Rico's PER according to his familiarity with the setting: Since the bar is in his home city, the referee gives the roll a modifier of +20, adding an additional modification of +10 for the stranger's receptive mood (i.e., slightly drunk). That gives Rico a chance of 60 (30 + 20 + 10) on the percentile dice of befriending the stranger. A 43 is rolled; Rico makes a good first impression on the stranger. The stranger tells Rico that his name is Carlos.

When the referee rolls a PER check, he should observe the table of racial reaction modifiers (STAR FRONTIERS Expanded Rules, p. 60). Because both Rico and Carlos are Human, there is no racial modifier. But only highly intelligent societies have eradicated stereotypes. Therefore, racial modifiers usually belong in calculations involving personality. Otherwise, the referee should restrict the modifiers to the general mood of the NPC and to the PC's familiarity with the setting.

Having gained Carlos' confidence, Rico decides to tell his new friend that he has acquired a new hovercycle. The outcome here depends on PER as well. In addition to the ability to win friends, PER determines a character's persuasive abilities. When a PC tries to persuade a group of NPCs, regardless of whether or not he has learned Persuasion, the referee should roll a PER check.

As a rule, a PER check should accompany any negotiations for money or seduction attempts. Successful or unsuccessful rolls don't necessarily mean success or failure in negotiations, although they may influence just how much a PC can get. Charm, or the power of personality, can swing a deal to the advantage of either participant.

Rico, rolling against the same modified chance of 60 that allowed him to rub elbows with Carlos, now tries to persuade Carlos to buy the hovercycle. The roll is 32; Carlos is interested. Unfortunately, he lacks the cash to put forth even a trifling offer. In return for Cr 50, however, Carlos offers the name of someone who needs a hovercycle. Rico the Snake accepts the lead. He gets up to leave the bar to find his prospective client.

In meeting strangers or settling a business deal, a high PER score can be a great asset. Social grace and magnetism help characters in many situations. In a crisis, however, a different brand of leadership emerges. Measured in LDR, this type of leadership involves the no-nonsense communication taught to military officers.

Task-oriented leaders are less interested in cordial relations than are social leaders. Whether Human flesh or Vrusk hide is on the line, danger affords no time to crack a joke. While in command, task-oriented leaders are more direct and more control-



ling. In fact, a good task-oriented leader may have a lousy personality.

So how does recognizing task-oriented leadership spice up the game? By way of rolling against the value of LDR, characters can advise others under pressure.

Suppose Rico and Carlos, while carousing in the bar, find themselves caught up in a brawl. Three upset Yazirians have started a fight. Rico, who holds Skill Level 3 in Martial Arts, yells, "Slap them in the eyes — they're sensitive!" Rolling against his LDR score of 40, Rico rolls a 29; he has told Carlos, who knows nothing about the martial arts, what to do. In the melee phase, Carlos tries to whomp his aggressor's reflective goggles. He succeeds and escapes being hurt. In this example, Rico has lent his Martial Arts skills to Carlos.

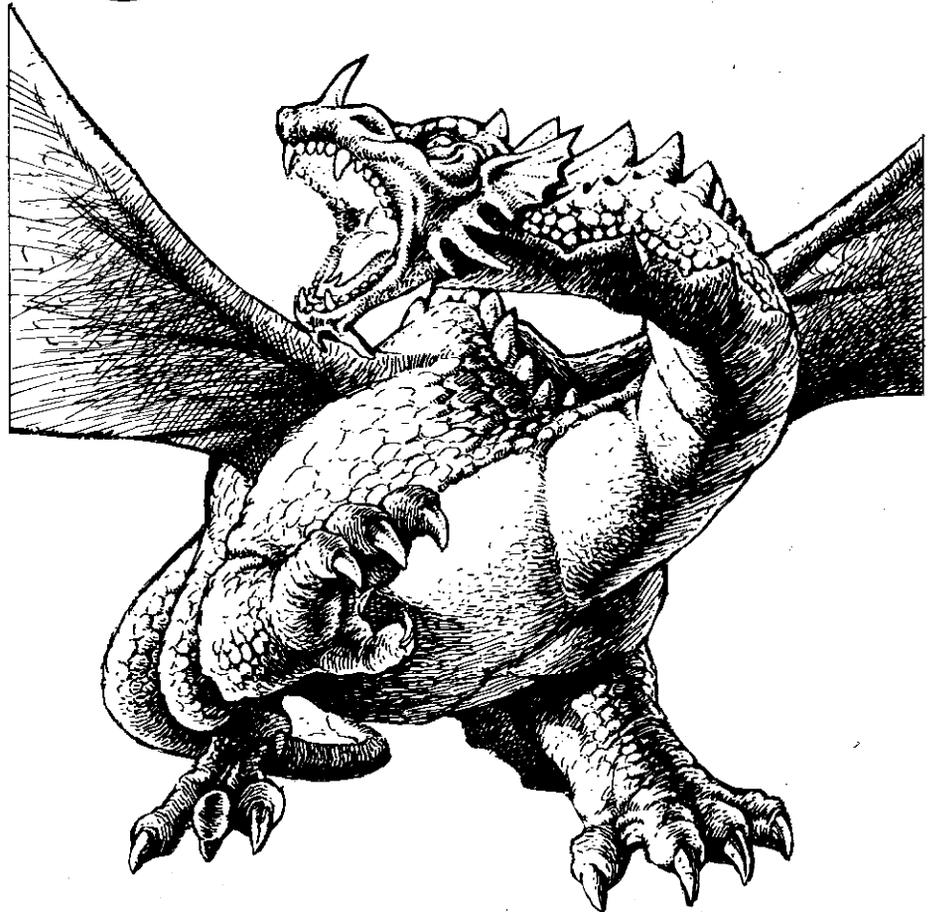
Translated into figures the referee can understand, the lending of a skill requires verification that the prospective listener can hear the speaker and a LDR check for the speaker. If both conditions are met and the LDR check succeeds, the listener borrows the skill. In all cases, the borrowed skill is received at Skill Level 1 on a temporary basis. In the case of Rico slapping the eyes of the Yazirian, the temporary basis was one round.

Keep in mind several limitations for lending and borrowing skills. A PC must reach Skill Level 2 in a skill before being able to lend it. Skills that may be shared include only military skills and the most basic in the remaining categories (such as Operating Computers, First Aid, Operating Vehicles, Stealth, and Concealment). Furthermore, a skill is received at Level 1 despite the expertise of the lender. It is impossible for a PC to make everyone nearby an expert in these skills.

Consider another application of skill-lending at the scene of the barroom brawl. Eventually, the fighting subsides and the Yazirians stumble out the door. Rico has suffered 20 points of damage from being clubbed with a Yazirian paw and a broken bottle. Even though Rico possesses First Aid at Skill Level 2, he cannot perform First Aid on himself; that skill can be performed on others only. But he is still conscious and decides to lend First Aid to Carlos. To succeed, Rico must roll less than his LDR score: 40. He rolls 84; as a result, he has failed to communicate the remedy effectively. Carlos, who finds himself unable to set the bandage, could try again, but getting his friend to the hospital might be more helpful.

Skill-lending, though limited in itself, can really improve an adventure on the whole by encouraging players to cooperate. An injured medic can advise another person on treating wounds. A vehicles specialist can coach non-drivers in the ways to use various kinds of transportation. By pointing out solid cover, a military character can help his friends evade enemy fire. Using LDR in this way justifies characters of different interests and professions coming together in the first place. Ω

THE DRAGON IS AWAKE



Surely, you've noticed. More color, more articles, a whole new look — and still, more than ever, the most powerful creature in the fantasy gaming world. See the DRAGON[®] Magazine subscription card in this issue for more information.

DRAGON is trademark of TSR, Inc. ©1987 TSR, Inc. All Rights Reserved.