

Dealing with Diplomacy

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Dealing with Diplomacy

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Summary

Weekly Challenge: Cultural Exchanges

Not normally in their wheelhouse, the Border Patrol cutter *Kestrel* finds itself making a delicate first contact, where high import is placed on the exchange of cultural gifts. If only they knew beforehand and if only they had a gift in turn to offer...

"Commodore Tanner requests any official meeting with the Giftari be delayed until proper representation. They hold significant stock to the cultural exchange of gifts. 200 years ago, a Tellarite delegation caused offence. They declined any further contact with the Federation. Command thinks..."

"Too late." Head bowed, Molly Cartwright pinched the bridge of her nose as, after a lengthy explanation of its historical significance, the delegation handed over some form of ancient sextant from their homeworld.

McGregor pointed out a similar prize upon the wall of the senior officer's lounge where this small impromptu first contact soiree was taking place.

T'Vel's features might have looked impassive but an eye of experience recognised the Vulcan running calculations of consequence as Eddie Garnder turned to his tumbler with a heavy swig, grousing into his beard. Stanley blinked with a strange garish smile, his best diplomatic make friends smile. Mercifully, the delegation directed their attention solely on McGregor.

Wincing, Tac dryly offered, "Perhaps they'll try again in another 200."

The senior officers assembled in the lounge turned to watch McGregor after returning the earth relic sextant to its ensconce and placed the Giftari object with care upon the lounge bar counter in pride of place. McGregor showed awe for their gift, imminently pleased. "It'll have pride of place right up alongside. I'll take it out onto the hull to read the stars and try it out, for myself."

There were a few startled glances at the ancient tool actually to be handled and used but the head delegate, Trullix offered a wan nervous smile, accepting it as a compliment. McGregor bobbed his head back at the delegate, mirroring the man in their strange diplomatic charade. Doctor Monroe in a hushed voice remarked at their lack of cultural gift to offer in return. "This is why the Fleet doesn't let us do this kind of thing. He's *not* going to offer them a drink and think that will work?"

"He wouldn't..." Molly didn't deign to finish that sentence. Not with the bar so close. And not as McGregor began to reach across the counter.

"Well, weren't like any of us were ever wanting to make it as ambassadors!"

"I've just the gift for you." Trullix's eyes widened in anticipation. The rest of the congregation leaned forward on tiptoe craning to look at the small package in McGregor's hand. Some audible aaahs soon met with some less than enthused oos at the less-than-impressive package, as McGregor began to extol the gift's merits.

With alarm, Molly sighted the gift in McGregor's hand. "Ah well, I was planning on retiring anyway."

McGregor continued. "...from Earth. My very own, from when I first joined. Been with me ever since. Look here at the symbols. This exemplifies health and compassion. This stands for industriousness and perseverance. This is a symbol of wealth, not the wealth of precious gems but those gifts that are the richest - friendship, joy, gratitude, knowledge. And this last, well I've always thought depicted luck."

"Is McGregor really going to pass off...?" Tac despaired amid the others trying to remain composed in the lineup. They nodded their heads in unison.

Trullix carefully received the gift, sifting through the various symbols as McGregor continued to enumerate and explain. The rest of the delegation had gone decidedly cool and quiet. "They've followed me from boat to boat. Through the years and passage of time. They represent my own life, health, career and work with the Dogs; they stand for all the friends and comrades with whom I've shared them with, and well, over the years they've brought me a little luck too."

"Share? In what manner?"

"Oh in games." McGregor waved to the table, bidding Trullix to take a seat. "Games of strategy, chance, probability, bluffing and luck."

"Oooh fascinating."

"How's about I teach you how to play some poker."

Trullix smiled. "Our people love games. That would be most agreeable. Such a personal gift."

"Eddie, I'll deal you in." With a flourish, McGregor shuffled as the others looked on incredulous.

Trullix stopped and pointed to a card. "And this one, you did not explain the significance of this '*card*'"

"Oh that one. That's the joker."

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