# 6.3. Character Relationships

And NPC Dispositions

This chapter presents some rules for defining and tracking relationships between players’ characters and NPCs.

**Author’s note:** As you’ll see, unlike most other rules in this book, these are less strict and are more on the descriptive side; many things are left open to interpretation. This is intentional, as I felt that too much mechanization and “gamification” in this area wouldn’t bring much benefit, but probably would hinder role-playing.

Relationship Levels:

The first and most important thing here are Relationship Levels (also called Dispositions; they are really just the numerical and descriptive side of the same coin). In essence, they are nothing more than simple predefined labels which we use to describe a relationship between two people (or two groups of people) in broad terms. They range from Friendly to Hostile, based on how a NPC sees a PC and what they would be willing to do for or against them.

Tracking Relationship Levels:

The table below describes possible relationship levels between an NPC and you (you as your in-game character). It is also applicable for relationships between two groups of people, and the GM and the players should decide for themselves whether they wish to track relationships individually, at the group level, or employ a mixed approach.

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| **Level** | **Disposition** | **Description: This person…** |
| +3 | Friendly | …considers you a friend and will often go out of their way to aid you. |
| +2 | Helpful | …has a positive attitude about you and will do you small favours. |
| +1 | Cordial | …likes you (at least superficially) and will help you if it’s convenient for them. |
| - | Indifferent | …doesn’t yet have a formed opinion about you, or simply doesn’t care. |
| -1 | Unfriendly | …doesn’t particularly like you but won’t get in your way if it’s onerous. |
| -2 | Antagonistic | …holds something against you and will often oppose you. |
| -3 | Hostile | …considers you an enemy and will actively work against or attack you. |

Feel free to interpret these descriptions loosely - be creative. For example, perhaps a person who is Friendly towards you doesn’t consider you a true friend so much as they respect your authority. Alternatively, maybe they owe you a favour, or simply believe in your cause and think helping you is the right thing to do.

That Special Someone:

For especially strong and significant relationships, we reserve two special categories: **More Than Friends** and **Nemesis**. The former is meant for the most loyal of friends, lifelong companions and lovers, and the latter for sworn enemies and others who have wronged and hurt you, and/or for whom you harbour a deep resentment.

In game terms, they function as “Friendly” and “Hostile” dispositions (albeit extreme versions of those) and have no special mechanics attached. However, we use More Than Friends and Nemesis to make it clearly known to everybody that these characters are special, and both the GM and the players should treat them as such when (role)playing the game.

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Asymmetrical Relationships:

Note that relationships don’t necessarily have to be symmetrical. For example, one person might consider another a friend, while the other one is indifferent. Maybe you’ll encounter an unreciprocated More Than Friends - well, what can you do…

Relationship Levels & Social Conflicts:

In the following chapter on resolving social conflicts, you’ll see that players will occasionally test skills like Consort and Sway to influence NPCs.

<Relationship levels work as passive Incentives and Objections as described in the following chapter.>

Initial NPC Dispositions:

<For now Indifferent or GM decides – it’s not that important anyway.>

Changing Dispositions:

While there are a few rules and abilities which explicitly mention NPC dispositions, most of the time it will be up to the GM and the players to employ common sense and do it when appropriate.

For example, helping out an NPC in their time of need, or simply collaborating with them fairly and being polite is certain to get you on their good side. On the other hand, offending them will get you on their bad side, and if you hurt or kill somebody they love, you can bet that you’ll make a new enemy, or even a nemesis!

NPC Statuses:

Statuses are what we call things which temporarily affect a relationship between NPCs and PCs. They are orthogonal to the Relationship Level between these parties, meaning that they can be freely combined.

For example, your parents can love you and be mad at you at the same time, and even your enemy could be swayed by a grand gesture displaying good faith.

Offended:

Same as in the real world, a person may become offended if you say or do something you shouldn’t have.

While an NPC has this status, all civil interactions with them, including those made to apologize, are done with a -1 or -2 (depending on the severity of the offense; GM decides) CM penalty. We say all ‘civil’ interactions mostly to exclude those that end up tied to the Command Skill, such as bossing around and intimidation, because, at that point, whether a person is offended or not has little significance.

It’s mostly up to the GM to arbitrate when an NPC becomes Offended. If you’re not sure, think of the NPC’s Beliefs and ideals, and try to imagine what they think of themselves, and whether what the PCs said goes against that – most of the time it will become obvious.

Deeply Offended:

This status is reserved for really catastrophic screw-ups on the PCs’ end. If an NPC becomes Deeply Offended and the PCs don’t immediately manage to recover the situation, they’ll refuse to participate in any further talks, basically becoming ‘closed off’. This is a nasty fail state for any kind of social interaction, as the NPC won’t listen until the PCs make amends (which should be difficult). This also implies that no further changes to the NPC’s Objections and Incentives are possible unless they accept an apology.

Same as with ‘regular’ offences, the GM arbitrates when NPCs become Deeply Offended.

Receptive:

+1 or +2 CM to all interactions after a thoughtful proactive gesture.

“Reception measures how willing someone is to listen to a PC. It’s kind of like general, all-purpose leverage. It’s the sort of thing I usually reward as a consequence for specific actions taken during the game. And it is basically a status. Someone is either Receptive or they are not. For example, if the PCs open their negotiation with the orc king with a gift and the gift is well-received, the orc king becomes Receptive. That means all actions get a bonus. As another example, if the PCs research orcish traditions before the meeting and make it a point to greet the orc in orcish and acknowledge their specific traditions, that might make the orc Receptive. Usually, I reserve reception for big, proactive gestures and clever plans that had some consequence for failure.”

<TODO: Example with destroying something before intimidating someone>

If an NPC is Receptive and the PCs offend him, he becomes no longer Receptive.

NPC Social Traits:

A NPC’s Social Traits reflect their personality, but specifically in regards to social interactions with others – basically, how they see themselves and how they like to be approached.

Some people like to feel superior and be flattered, some seek personal gain, some respect strength, some respond well to sympathy, and some simply have frail personalities that will succumb under pressure.

All of this becomes relevant when arguing with NPCs and trying to convince or persuade them to do something or see something your way. In game terms, Social Traits describe how NPCs react to six different situations:

* **Bribery:** The NPC has their personal profit and gain as their priority. (The bribe doesn’t have to be literal or illegal.)
* **Empathy:** This person will respond best when met with genuine care and benevolence.
* **Flattery:** The NPC likes to feel superior to others and is best approached with compliments and humility.
* **Flirting:** The quickest way to this person’s affection may be through their heart… Or at least their pants.
* **Pressure:** This person has low self-esteem and a weak will and will cave into pressure easily.
* **Reason:** This NPC is the type who respects hard facts and logic.

Each of these is assigned a value in the form of a number (0-3) and prefixed with either L (like) or D (dislike), except zero which has no prefix.

For example, an NPC with L3 Bribery is extremely focused in personal gain and will be favourable towards propositions that lead there.

A scientist or judge will probably have L2 or L3 Reason and will respond well to being presented with tangible evidence.

Note that the notation is a bit awkward for Pressure - having an L-prefixed rating there doesn’t mean that the character is a masochist and likes being intimidated, just that intimidation attempts (and just exerting a dominating presence in general) will probably be highly effective with them.

On the other hand, D-prefixed ratings means that that approach doesn’t sit well with the NPC – disliking Empathy could mean that they interpret it as a sign of weakness; disliking Flattery maybe means that the NPC will view the PCs as suck-ups; a D-prefixed rating for Pressure means that they are a strong-willed person who won’t be coerced easily, and so on.

Obviously, there’s some room for interpretation, so be creative.

As mentioned, these Social Traits that NPCs possess come into effect when resolving social conflicts; see page XX.

Generating Social Traits:

The first and most straight-forward method for generating Social Traits is that the GM simply assign them manually according to what they think the NPC should behave like.

The second method is to roll a d6, and use the table below to assign the value to a trait, then flip it, and use the result on the opposite side of the die to assign a value to the next trait. Repeat this 3 times to assign all 6 traits in the following order: Bribery, Pressure, Empathy, Flattery, Flirting, Reason.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **d6 result** | **Social Trait value** |
| 1 | D1 |
| 2 | D2 |
| 3 | D3 |
| 4 | L1 |
| 5 | L2 |
| 6 | L3 |

The third method is to roll a d6 for each of Bribery, Pressure, Empathy, Flattery, Flirting and Reason and use the table above to assign values to them in that order.

Whatever the chosen method, remember that a NPCs likes and dislikes should be more or less balanced. Giving them more dislikes will make resolving a social conflict with them more of a challenge, and vice versa.