

NEGOTIATION

Negotiation gives the heroes a chance to get what they want without combat ... or at least without further combat! You might negotiate with a king to obtain military support against an incursion of demons in a neighboring country. You could enter into talks with a bandit leader to convince her to stop attacking merchant caravans on the road, and instead target nobles loyal to a tyrant. You might attempt to convince an archmage to allow you access to their secret library so you can research the location of a dragon-slaying axe. Negotiation covers all these scenarios and more.

Think of negotiation as something like learning a new system for combat, exploration, or investigation in an RPG. This set of rules provides a framework for roleplaying. The negotiation rules are meant to be read by players and Directors, so that both understand the rules of negotiation. If you've never played a game with a dedicated negotiation system like this, you might need to run it once or twice before you master it, similar to learning any new subsystem in an RPG. If a player hasn't read these rules, the Director and other players who have can explain them to that player during their first negotiation.

Negotiation is a framework for important roleplaying encounters in which the heroes want to convince an NPC to take a particular course of action, such as lending the heroes an artifact or pardoning a prisoner. This framework tracks the NPC's interest in the hero's arguments and their patience, so that the Director know what the NPC is willing to offer and when it's time to end the scene. This framework shouldn't replace roleplaying (though it certainly can if your group doesn't enjoy that part of RPGs). It's here to help players and Directors understand the structure of a give and take conversation and give some rules that can make a high-stakes conversation even more dramatic!

When to Negotiate

In order for a negotiation to occur, an NPC must have an interest in negotiating with the heroes—but must also have a reason to not simply jump on board with whatever the heroes propose. Negotiations happen only when an NPC has that internal tension between interest and reluctance. For example, if the characters ask a king to send his army into a neighboring kingdom to battle a demon incursion, the king needs to be conflicted. He wants to stop the incursion, but he doesn't want to risk the lives of his soldiers defending a foreign nation while leaving their own people unprotected. If the heroes want the help of the king's army, they need to negotiate.

Heroes aren't expected to use the negotiation rules every time one character tries to convince an NPC to see things their way. For instance, if a hero wants information about a cult leader from a captured cultist, a single Presence test using the Lie skill or a Might test using Intimidate is likely all that's needed. A character who wants to flirt with the local alchemist to obtain a free Healing Potion likely just needs to make a Presence test using the Flirt skill.

By contrast, negotiations typically involve all the heroes interacting with one or more important named NPCs who can provide information, items, or services that dramatically change the course of an adventure. Often, this involves the heroes seeking an item of great power, a retainer or companion, the services of an influential organiza-

tion or nation, or a plot-twist-worthy piece of information. Convincing a lich to lend the party the legendary *Codex Mortis*, trying to convince a dragon to halt an attack on a wizard's tower, or talking the leaders of an enemy army into standing down means that a negotiation is in order.

To negotiate successfully, the heroes must make persuasive arguments to convince NPCs to do what they want. "Do it or we kill you" is a threat that might well accompany a single Might test using the Intimidate skill, but it's not a negotiating tactic.

Limits of Negotiation

Some players might instinctively feel that the negotiation rules should give them something akin to mind-control superpowers. They're not used to imagining NPCs complexly, and might attempt to negotiate in situations where negotiation is either completely unreasonable or literally impossible. No matter how persuasive or well-spoken a hero is, there's no argument to be made that might convince the vile Lord Syuul to give up his pursuit of evil and become a gardener. A negotiation typically can't convince a queen to hand over her crown to the heroes and name them the new rulers of the land, or inspire a dragon to fork over every piece of treasure in their hoard. Negotiations only work when the heroes ask for something from an NPC that the NPC is willing to seriously consider giving them.

Negotiation is not a process that changes an NPC's character. Rather, the heroes are trying to make an NPC understand how behaving differently would be in character. You might well be able to get the hitherto loyal lieutenant of an evil boss to reconsider the error of their ways. That's a classic dramatic trope. But even then, you're not changing their character—you're convincing them that their current evil ways are out of character. "Is this who you are? Is this how you want to be remembered?!"

If some players want to use the negotiation system as a means to an end by having their characters say, "Just do what we tell you, or else!", you can remind them that that's not how most people, including NPCs, work. Any heroes who open with that attitude are likely to lose the negotiation before it begins.

The Threat of Violence

In the real world, negotiations rarely come with a threat of immediate violence. Ambassadors don't usually get into fistfights. But this is a heroic fantasy RPG, featuring heroes who are armed to the teeth and able to alter reality with their minds. The threat of violence is already implied. Everyone involved knows that the characters could draw steel at any moment.

The Director typically assumes that the underlying potential for events to turn violent is already factored into every negotiation. However, if the heroes decide to bring that threat to the forefront, then they've exited the realm of negotiation and have entered into a different type of relationship—and it's probably time to draw steel.

Negotiation is about persuading someone to help you willingly because you've convinced them that meeting your objectives is a good idea. Working with you is wise or logical, or might make them look good. A hero can absolutely threaten someone with violence and force them to do what they want, but this is an incredibly temporary state. A threatened NPC isn't willingly doing what they've been asked. They're doing it on threat of violence, and will comply only while that threat is evident—after which, they'll likely go back to their previous behavior as soon as they think they can get away with it.

Negotiation Stats

During negotiation, the Director assigns NPCs four temporary statistics and features—interest, patience, motivations, and pitfalls. The heroes can strike a favorable deal if they maximize an NPC's interest by making arguments that invoke the NPC's motivations and avoid their pitfalls—but they have to do all that before the NPC's patience wears out.

Interest

An NPC's interest represents how eager they are to make a deal with the heroes. Interest is graded on a scale of 0 (no interest) to 5 (the most possible interest). When a negotiation begins, an NPC's interest is between 1 and 4. If the NPC's interest goes to 5, they make a final offer and the negotiation ends (see [Keep Going or Stop](#), below). If the NPC's interest drops to 0, they end a negotiation without offering the heroes any deal.

Interest increases and decreases during the negotiation based on the arguments the heroes make.

Patience

An NPC's patience represents how much time and effort they're willing to devote to a negotiation. Patience is graded on a scale of 0 to 5, with each NPC starting a negotiation with their patience higher than 0. If an NPC's patience reaches 0, the NPC makes a final offer and negotiation ends (see [Keep Going or Stop](#)).

Patience can decrease each time the heroes make an argument during a negotiation.

LANGUAGE AND PATIENCE

If one or more heroes negotiating with an NPC can communicate in the NPC's native language (not including Caelian), then the NPC's patience increases by 1 at the start of the negotiation (to a maximum of 5). If three or more heroes negotiating with an NPC can communicate in the NPC's native language, the NPC's patience increases by 2 (to a maximum of 5). [Chapter 4: Background](#) has information on some of the languages in the game.

Motivations

Each NPC has at least two motivations the heroes can appeal to with their arguments. Arguments that appeal to an NPC's motivation require an easier power roll to increase the NPC's interest. Arguments that don't appeal to a motivation require a more difficult power roll. See [Making Arguments](#) below for more information.

Each motivation can be successfully appealed to only once during a negotiation. To successfully appeal to a motivation, the heroes must use the motivation in an argument without mentioning one of the NPC's pitfalls or being caught in a lie.

Pitfalls

Pitfalls are motivations that spark ire, discomfort, shame, fear, or some other negative response in an NPC. Using a pitfall in an argument causes an NPC's interest and patience to wane. Each NPC has at least one pitfall, and many have at least two.

Pitfalls and motivations are two sides of the same concept. They're presented below as a single list, because what might be a motivation for one NPC is a pitfall for another. Whenever the heroes make an argument, they risk stumbling into one of an NPC's pitfalls unless they do their research beforehand or read the NPC well.

List of Motivations and Pitfalls

An NPC can have any of the following twelve motivations or pitfalls.

BENEVOLENCE

An NPC with the benevolence motivation believes in sharing what they have with others. However, an NPC involved in a negotiation must be limited in their benevolence, so that they don't just give the heroes what they need.

Sometimes an NPC's benevolence might extend only to a specific group of people, so that a benevolent pirate captain might share their plunder freely with the rest of their crew—but they're still plundering! Other times, an NPC's charity might be limited by the fact that they don't have much to give. A benevolent NPC might be hesitant to give the heroes help because they believe their limited resources are more necessary or could do more good somewhere else.

An NPC with the benevolence pitfall has a cynical view of the world, believing that no creature has a right to anything just by being alive. The idea of helping others because it's the right thing to do is a preposterous, immature, or inexperienced idea to be laughed off or snuffed out.

Arguments that appeal to a benevolence motivation contend that if the NPC strikes a deal with the heroes, the people the NPC cares about will benefit from the deal. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ "If you lend us the Sword of Agathor, we can make Capital safer for your guild by using it to lay your enemies low."
- ♦ "If you can teleport us into the dragon's cave, we'll give you half the wyrm's hoard once we cut off the creature's head. That could benefit generations of students at your academy!"

DISCOVERY

An NPC with the discovery motivation wants to learn new lore, explore forgotten places, break ground with new experiments, or uncover artifacts lost to time. Their curiosity and quest for knowledge might be driven by a specific goal, such as seeking the cure for a rare disease or a portal to a specific far-off world. Or they could be a naturally inquisitive person who simply wants to understand all they can about the timescape.

An NPC with the discovery pitfall has no interest in finding new places, peoples, or ideas. It might be that the unknown scares them or makes them so uncomfortable that they'd rather remain ignorant. Alternatively, a previous pursuit of discovery might have turned out poorly for them.

Arguments that appeal to a discovery motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes will allow the NPC to gain new knowledge or acquire unique property. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ "Allow us to use your cipher to translate the only copy of the *Codex Mortis*, and then we'll let you read the book when we're done."

- ♦ “We know the journey to Decant Isle is dangerous, but we’re going into uncharted territory. We thought that your crew of sailors might want to be among the few mortals to lay eyes on the place.”

FREEDOM

An NPC with the freedom motivation wants no authority above them and desires no authority over others. They might already have personal freedom and wish to maintain that status quo, or they might wish to liberate themselves or others from someone else’s authority.

An NPC with the freedom pitfall believes that a world without authority is one in turmoil and chaos. They might even believe that they are the right person to rule, and that their ideals should be the ones that become the law of the land.

Arguments that appeal to a freedom motivation contend that by helping the heroes, an NPC will maintain or grant freedom to themselves or other people. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ “I know you want to have the queen’s authority revoked forever. She has no heirs. Give us the key to her study so that we can prove her corruption and give you a chance to topple the monarchy henceforth.”
- ♦ “If you promise to give us ten vials of Assassin’s Kiss, we’ll see to it that the baron’s prison is emptied.”

GREED

An NPC with the greed motivation desires wealth and resources above almost anything else. Sometimes these NPCs are misers, much like wyrms who hoard coins and gems but never spend or donate them. Others flaunt their wealth, viewing it as a sign of their station in life.

Greed-driven NPCs might share their wealth with a select group of people they love, such as a noble lord who indulges his children’s every desire. Some NPCs might be greedy for resources other than money, such as a demon who wants to collect and devour souls, or a troll lord who hungers endlessly for the flesh of others.

An NPC with the greed pitfall has no interest in accumulating wealth or other resources, and becomes offended if anyone tries to buy their partnership. They hold their ideals above material desires.

Arguments that appeal to a greed motivation contend that helping the heroes will increase the NPC’s wealth or assets. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ “You should help us battle the overmind. Xorranox’s wealth is legendary, and we’ll see to it that you get your fair share.”
- ♦ “Give us a week to do research among your private collection of books, and we’ll give you another ten unique tomes we found in an ancient star elf sanctuary.”

HIGHER AUTHORITY

An NPC with the higher authority motivation remains staunchly loyal to a person or force they perceive as more important than themselves. This higher authority could be an organization, a deity or being of great power, a formal leader such as a noble or monarch, a mystical presence or force the NPC might not fully understand, or a person the NPC sees as an informal authority figure (an older sibling, a personal hero, and so forth).

An NPC with the higher authority pitfall scoffs at the idea of serving another. The NPC might not believe that all people should be free, but they certainly believe that they personally shouldn’t have to answer to anyone.

Arguments that appeal to a higher authority motivation contend that it’s in the interest of the higher authority for the NPC to strike

a deal with the heroes. A hero might even tell the NPC that if the higher authority were in the NPC’s position, they would take the deal. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ “All great creations honor your god, Malus. If you teach me to forge the Hammer of Azdul, that will be a great honor to bestow upon your god.”
- ♦ “You know what Jarith the Bold would do? He’d guide us through the vast wasteland of the desert to reach the tower. Will you be our Jarith?”

JUSTICE

An NPC with the justice motivation wants to see the righteous rewarded and the wicked punished, however subjective their sense of who or what is good and evil. A priest who venerates a god of nature might believe that all who protect plants and animals are righteous, and that those who harvest natural resources as miners and lumberjacks do must die. Having a justice motivation doesn’t necessarily make an NPC kind or charitable.

An NPC with the justice pitfall doesn’t believe that the timescape is an inherently just place, and has no interest in making it one. The world is eternal conflict, there is no such thing as justice, and anyone who thinks otherwise is a naive fool.

Arguments that appeal to a justice motivation position the heroes on the good side of an NPC’s sense of right and wrong. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ “You despise those who steal from nature. Allow us peacefully into your wode so we may bottle the Blessed Spring’s water. We’re going to use it to stop an army from felling every tree and tearing up the earth wherever they go.”
- ♦ “You think nobles are lazy barons who get rich off the backs of peasants. We want to dethrone Lord Saxton. Lend us your crew of thieves, and we’ll make sure that when Saxton falls, the people can choose their own leaders.”

LEGACY

An NPC with the legacy motivation desires fame while alive and acclaim that lasts long after their death. They hope others will know and remember their deeds, great or terrible. Some of these NPCs might even seek immortality through deification or undeath, so that the eventual shedding of their mortal coil doesn’t prevent them from continuing to make history.

An NPC with a legacy pitfall cares nothing about leaving a personal mark on the world. To them, such vain thinking is nothing but a waste of time.

Arguments that appeal to a legacy motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes increases the likelihood that people will talk about the NPC for centuries to come. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ “If you give us the vizier’s itinerary, I’ll compose a song about your bravery in defying him, then sing it in every tavern from here to Ix!”
- ♦ “Yes, losing the battle is a possibility. If we do, the gnolls will still come for you eventually. But if we crush our foes, imagine the honors, the histories, the poems, the statues—all of it created for you because your siege engines turned the tide.”

PEACE

An NPC with the peace motivation wants calm in their life. Under typical circumstances, they want to be left alone to run their business, farm, kingdom, criminal empire, or whatever small slice of the timescape is theirs. Some such NPCs don’t have peace and need

help obtaining it, while others want their peaceful status quo to be maintained.

An NPC with the peace pitfall hates being bored. They want excitement, drama, and danger in their life. For them, there's nothing worse than the status quo.

Arguments that appeal to a peace motivation contend that helping the heroes will earn the NPC some peace, at least for a little while. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ "You have a good thing going here. A little burgling of nobles, some alcohol smuggling, and some illegal gambling dens. No one's getting hurt, but Constable Cofax is closing in on you. We could redirect him toward some real danger to the community, if you can help us set a trap for the Watchmaker."
- ♦ "I know you don't sell to outsiders, but we need that helm. I'm going to use it to turn back a group of hobgoblins marching this way. They're not going to be as friendly as us."

POWER

An NPC with the power motivation covets the authority of others. They want to increase their influence, no matter how great it already is, and maintain their domain. They might seek power through conquering others, the collection of artifacts, or through the infusion of supernatural rituals—though why choose one method when all three together achieve the best results? Some such NPCs are world-traversing tyrants, but the petty administrators of village organizations and shrines can covet power just as hungrily.

An NPC with the power pitfall has no interest in authority for themselves. They might respect the authority of others, but they hate the thought of ruling over other people and roundly reject any suggestion of the idea.

Arguments that appeal to a power motivation contend that working with the heroes will increase or protect the NPC's power. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ "Everyone knows you should be running the watch, Percy. The old lady's retiring, and our friend Baron Kuglar is naming the replacement. Now, you let us into the restricted armory, and we'll put in a good word."
- ♦ "We know he's your brother, Your Highness, but he's older—first in line for the throne. If you help us prove he's in a cult, you become the favorite son."

NPCs Change Over Time

Just like the heroes, NPCs in negotiations are complex individuals who can change over time. It's possible that the heroes might have to negotiate with the same NPC for several different favors during the course of a campaign, over which time the NPC's motivations and pitfalls might change. If the heroes turn a bandit captain with the greed and power motivations into a temporary ally, that criminal might learn from them, changing their ways to rob only those who exploit the poor and giving those earnings to people in need. The next time the heroes negotiate with the bandit captain, they have the benevolence and protection motivations.

PROTECTION

An NPC with the protection motivation has land, people, information, items, or an organization they want protected above all else. Keeping their charge safe is a duty they hold dear, and aiding in that protection earns their favor. Most people have friends or family they wish to

protect, but an NPC with the protection motivation believes in doing so at any cost.

An NPC with the protection pitfall is happy to leave others to fend for themselves. They don't believe it's their responsibility to protect anyone other than themselves, and might be outright disgusted at the thought of risking their life or their property to protect others.

Arguments that appeal to a protection motivation contend that helping the heroes allows an NPC to better protect their charge. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ "Dead soldiers grow the necromancer's ranks. Total annihilation is the only way to defeat her. March with us now, while her army is small, and we'll defeat her. Or you could gamble that someone else tries, fails, and suddenly she's at the border, ready to overrun your kingdom with an army tenfold larger than what it is now."
- ♦ "I understand your grandchild is hell-bent on joining the service. I happen to have a magic suit of armor that could help them ward off the blows of monsters and ruffians. I'd be happy to give it to you, in exchange for borrowing your griffons for a few days. After all, I won't need the armor if I can simply fly over the marsh's monsters."

REVELRY

An NPC with the revelry motivation just wants to have fun. They enjoy socializing at parties, thrill-seeking, or indulging in other hedonistic activities. Getting pleasure out of life while spending time with people they like is paramount to such NPCs.

An NPC with the revelry pitfall sees social encounters and hedonism as a waste of time. They take pleasure only in work or in building their own skills and character. Others who suggest immature debauchery are not worth their time.

Arguments that appeal to the revelry motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes will allow the NPC to get back to reveling sooner, longer, or harder. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ "How would you like to have the most exclusive songs for your exclusive birthday celebration next week? I'll write you a whole original set list, free of charge ... provided you extend me and my band here an invitation."
- ♦ "I know you don't want to forge five Chronokinesis Crowns. How's this instead? You do that for me, and I'll give you the fourteen kegs of whiskey we found in a steel-dwarf ruin. This stuff is old, unique, and forget-your-first-name potent. You can crack a keg with your friends to celebrate a job well done."

VENGEANCE

An NPC with the vengeance motivation wants to harm another who has hurt them. Their desire for revenge could be proportional to the harm that was inflicted upon them, or they might wish to pay back their pain with interest. In some cases, a desire for vengeance can be satisfied only by the death of another, but an NPC might wish to pay back their own suffering with embarrassment, career failure, or some other less permanent pain.

An NPC with the vengeance pitfall believes that revenge solves nothing. They might have gained this belief firsthand, or they might simply not have the ambition to seek revenge—and they take a dim view of others who do.

Arguments that appeal to the vengeance motivation contend that the NPC can gain payback for their pain by helping the heroes. Example arguments include the following:

- ♦ “The servants of Ajax killed your sister as she scoured the city for his cults. The Black Iron Pact works for the Overlord. Give us her diaries, and we might uncover the pact’s hideaway and deal a great blow to your hated foes.”
- ♦ “That prankster Huckable made your trousers tear at the last council meeting. Don’t you want to pay him back? We can arrange a delicious prank at the next gathering, but we need you to guarantee the safety of the orc refugees.”

Opening a Negotiation

A negotiation begins when the heroes ask something of an NPC and the Director deems that the circumstances require a negotiation. Those circumstances always involve the heroes requiring assistance that could change the course of the adventure, and having the NPC conflicted about working with them. Unlike combat, which can be thrust upon the heroes by violent allies or unexpected circumstances, the heroes must be the ones to willingly start a negotiation. Characters must want something from an NPC. Otherwise they have no reason to negotiate!

The Director can decide that an NPC who has something the players want could show up at their door and ask if the heroes want to negotiate. But it’s always okay for the characters to say, “Not interested,” and refuse to do so.

Stop Combat, Start Negotiation

If a hero wants to halt hostilities to negotiate with the other side, they can use a maneuver to make a hard Presence test (or another applicable test, as the Director determines) in an attempt to stop combat and start a negotiation. The test has a chance of success only if the Director believes the other side is willing and capable of negotiating. A foe who has the upper hand, who hates the heroes beyond measure, or who lacks sapience is unlikely to negotiate.

Starting Stats

An NPC’s starting negotiation stats depend on their attitude toward the heroes, as shown on the Negotiation Starting Attitudes table, and can be adjusted by the Director as they see fit. A naturally irascible NPC might have lower patience, while a hostile NPC with a greater-than-expected stake in the negotiation topic might have a higher-than-typical interest.

◆ Negotiation Starting Attitudes ◆

Attitude	Description	Interest	Patience
Hostile	Openly opposed to the heroes. Barely willing to listen.	1	2
Suspicious	Doubts the heroes’ motives but is willing to listen.	2	2
Neutral	Doesn’t feel one way or the other. Would probably rather be somewhere else, but doesn’t want to be rude.	2	3
Open	Willing to listen, willing to help, as long as the heroes aren’t asking too much.	3	3
Friendly	The heroes seem like the NPC’s people. The NPC is willing to give them the benefit of the doubt.	3	4
Trusting	The NPC has reason to take the heroes at their word and will help if the characters don’t screw this up.	3	5

Uncovering Motivations

If a hero wishes to figure out an NPC’s motivations, they can begin by simply asking, “What do you want out of this deal?” In response, the NPC can willingly hint at or reveal one of their motivations, usually by asking for something. For instance, a monarch NPC with the greed motivation and a penchant for collecting rare animals might suggest that the heroes retrieving a griffon egg would earn the monarch’s gratitude. The Director can also decide that during the natural course of the negotiation, the NPC might offer up similar suggestions without the heroes asking, provided the NPC already has an interest of 3 or higher.

If an NPC isn’t as forthcoming, or if the heroes want to learn one of the NPC’s pitfalls, a hero can make a Reason, Intuition, or Presence test while interacting with the NPC during the negotiation, based on the tactics used to draw out the NPC. The test has the following outcomes:

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- ⚡11 The hero learns no information regarding the NPC’s motivations or pitfalls, and the NPC realizes the hero is trying to read them and becomes annoyed. As a consequence, the NPC’s patience is reduced by 1.
- 12-16 The hero learns no information regarding the NPC’s motivations or pitfalls.
- 17+ The hero learns one of the NPC’s motivations or pitfalls (their choice).

After this test is made, the heroes can’t make another test to determine the same NPC’s motivations or pitfalls until they make an argument to the NPC or the negotiation ends.

Outside of Negotiation

While the heroes can discover an NPC’s motivations or pitfalls through tests made during negotiation, they can employ other methods of investigating motivations or pitfalls before negotiation. Research or a little reconnaissance (for instance, reading the NPC’s diary or talking to their closest friends) can reveal quite a bit about a person!

Making Arguments

As part of their initial request to an NPC in a negotiation, a hero makes an argument as to why the NPC should give the heroes what they want. The hero might offer to do something in exchange as part of their argument, such as clearing bandits from a forest, handing over a piece of treasure, or slaying a dragon for the NPC. Or instead of offering something, the hero could attempt to convince the NPC that it’s in their own best interest to help—or even that it’s a moral imperative. For example, a hero could appeal to a knight’s sense of duty, the potential wealth a mercenary could make, or the final wish of a queen’s dearly departed grandmother as part of an argument. NPCs who admire the heroes are more likely to respond to compliments and buttering up, while those who fear the heroes are more likely to respond to intimidation and awe.

Arguments need a justification as to why they’re true. “Helping us defeat Lord Saxton is good for you in the long run,” is half an argument, but the hero also needs to explain why this is the case. “Helping us defeat Lord Saxton is good for you in the long run, because we know he’s coming for your kingdom after Bedegar falls!” If a hero makes half an argument, the NPC might follow up with questions such as, “Why do you say that?” or “What makes you think that’s true?” to get the full argument from them.

One hero makes an argument to an NPC, but the players can discuss the details of the argument out of character beforehand. It’s up to the group to decide how much discussion to have before making an argument, and to decide what argument the players think will best sway the NPC.

This is a good topic for discussion before a group actually gets into a negotiation, so everyone knows the other players' thoughts. Some groups have the most fun without any around-the-table discussion, while others prefer being able to strategize as often as possible.

Appeal to Motivation

If an argument doesn't include a pitfall and appeals to one of the NPC's motivations that hasn't already been appealed to, the hero making the argument can make a medium test to attempt to sway the NPC with the argument. Depending on the argument, this can be a Reason, Intuition, or Presence test using any applicable skill—most commonly a skill from the interpersonal skill group. The test has the following outcomes:

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- ≤11** The NPC's patience decreases by 1.
- 12-16** The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience decreases by 1.
- 17+** The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience doesn't change.

At the Director's discretion, a particularly well-roleplayed or well-reasoned argument automatically counts as a tier 3 outcome without a test. Good roleplaying should be rewarded!

If the heroes attempt to appeal to a motivation that's already been appealed to, the NPC's interest remains the same and their patience decreases by 1.

Appealing to Multiple Motivations

If a hero makes an argument that appears to appeal to more than one of an NPC's motivations, the Director can ask for clarification. After listing the motivations it seemed as though the player was trying to appeal to, they can ask the player to pick one from the list. If the player had another motivation in mind, it's up to the Director whether the argument appealed to that specific motivation or not.

No Motivation or Pitfall

If an argument doesn't include one of the NPC's motivations or pitfalls, the hero who makes the argument must make a more difficult test to appeal to the NPC. The test has the following outcomes:

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- ≤11** The NPC's patience decreases by 1, and their interest decreases by 1.
- 12-16** The NPC's patience decreases by 1.
- 17+** The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience decreases by 1.

Effect: On a natural 19 or 20, the NPC's patience remains the same.

If the heroes try to use the same argument without a pitfall or motivation twice, the test automatically obtains a tier 1 outcome.

Caught in a Lie

If a hero lies to an NPC with an argument that fails to increase the NPC's interest, the Director can decide that the NPC catches the lie and is offended by it. The NPC's interest decreases by 1, in addition to any decrease imposed by the failure.

Everyone Can Participate

Since Reason and Intuition with creatively applied skills can be used to make arguments, all heroes can actively participate in the process of negotiation. The hero with the highest Presence who has the Persuade skill doesn't automatically have to be the one who makes all the tests.

Pitfall Used

If an argument uses one of the NPC's pitfalls, it automatically fails and the NPC's interest and patience each decrease by 1. The NPC might also warn the heroes not to treat them in such a way again.

Renown and Negotiation

Renown determines whether a hero's fame (or infamy) has any sway over an NPC. A hero's reputation can make a negotiation easier, provided that hero knows how to capitalize on it.

During a negotiation, an NPC has an **Impression score** that determines the amount of Renown needed to influence them with fame alone (see **Renown** in **Chapter 13: Rewards**). This score matters only if the NPC knows of the heroes. A dragon who slumbered away the last hundred years and was just woken up to negotiate can't be influenced by a hero's Renown. (By the way, it's a terrible idea to wake a dragon, even if they do know you're famous.) If the NPC does know of the hero and has an Impression score that is equal to or lower than the hero's Renown, the NPC can be influenced by that hero's reputation.

The higher an NPC's Impression score, the harder they are to influence with Renown. A small-time brigand has a lower Impression score than a monarch who meets with powerful and famous people all the time. The NPCs and Impression table provides examples of different archetypical NPC Impression scores. If a creature has a level, then their Impression score equals their level unless the Director deems otherwise.

FAME OR INFAMY?

If a hero has enough Renown for their score to influence an NPC during negotiation, the Director decides if the hero is famous or infamous to the NPC. If the NPC appreciates a character's deeds and views them as a hero who makes the world a better place, that hero is famous to them. If the NPC believes the hero's accomplishments make the world worse and views them as an enemy, the hero is infamous to the NPC.

NPCs and Impression

Impression	Example NPC
1	Brigand leader, commoner, shop owner
2	Knight, local guildmaster, professor
3	Cult leader, locally known mage, noble lord
4	Assassin, baron, locally famous entertainer
5	Captain of the watch in a large city, high priest, viscount
6	Count, warlord
7	Marquis, world-renowned entertainer
8	Duke, spymaster
9	Archmage, prince
10	Demon lord, monarch
11	Archdevil, archfey, demigod
12	Deity, titan

INFLUENCING TESTS

If a hero is famous to an NPC, they gain an edge on tests when making arguments to which the Flirt, Lead, or Persuade skill could be applied. If they are infamous to the NPC, they gain an edge on tests when making arguments to which the Brag, Interrogate, or Intimidate skill could be applied. A hero gains this edge even if they don't have the appropriate skill.

NPC Response and Offer

After a hero makes an argument, an NPC responds in one of three ways:

- An NPC responds positively if the heroes increase the NPC's interest. "That's an excellent point." "You've given me much to consider." "Fair enough." "Makes sense to me."
- An NPC responds negatively if the heroes decrease their interest. "I don't buy that." "Poppycock!" "I hear you, but I disagree." "That's not going to sway me."
- An NPC responds with impatience if the heroes fail to increase or decrease their interest. "I've heard that before." "Are you going to offer me anything real?" "This debate is tiresome." "BORING!"

Unless the NPC is deceitful, it should be clear to the heroes if their argument helped convince the NPC, if they need to take a new approach, or if the argument actually did more harm than good.

The initial response should come with an offer (or a refusal to make an offer) based on the NPC's current interest. If a hero's argument reduces an NPC's patience to 0, the NPC lets the heroes know that this is their final offer.

Interest 5 ("Yes, and ...")

If the NPC's interest is 5, they offer everything the heroes initially asked for—and then sweeten the deal. This represents the best possible outcome for the heroes. If they offered to perform any services or make payments as part of the deal, the NPC might waive those obligations, allowing the heroes to get what they want for free. Alternatively, the NPC might hold the heroes to any offers they made and instead offer an extra service or item on top of what was asked for.

For example, if the heroes asked the boss of a thieves' guild for that organization's help in standing against Lord Saxton, the guildmaster might pledge to send a unit of elite assassins to aid in the battle against that tyrannical noble, and then offer the heroes a quiver filled with explosive arrows to give them an additional advantage in the fight.

The NPC should let the heroes know that this is the best offer they can make.

Interest 4 ("Yes.")

If the NPC's interest is 4, they offer the heroes everything they asked for but won't sweeten the deal. The NPC also accepts anything the heroes have offered as part of the deal with this outcome.

For example, if the heroes offered to help spring a guild thief from prison in exchange for the elite assassins of the thieves' guild standing against Lord Saxton, the guildmaster agrees to those terms without attempting to adjust anything. This likely ends the negotiation, but it's possible that the heroes could push for a little more, provided the NPC has the patience for another argument. A Director could prompt the heroes to push for more by having the NPC ask a leading question, such as, "Is there anything else?" or "What else do you want from me?"

Interest 3 ("Yes, but ...")

If the NPC's interest is 3, they offer the heroes what they want in exchange for everything the heroes offered ... then they ask for a little extra, such as a favor or a payment from the characters. If the heroes offered to free a thieves' guild member from prison in exchange for the service of the organization's assassins, the guildmaster might ask them to free an additional prisoner, or to grant the prisoner they rescue a sum of cash or a magic weapon.

Interest 2 ("No, but ...")

If the NPC's interest is 2, the NPC can't give the heroes what they want. However, they are willing to offer other less impactful goods or services in exchange for whatever the heroes have promised. The guildmaster might not be willing to spare any troops to fight Lord Saxton, but could instead offer the latest spy reports on Saxton's movements in exchange for the jailbreak.

Interest 1 ("No.")

If the NPC's interest is 1, they outright reject the heroes' idea without a counteroffer. If the NPC still has patience, they might press the heroes for a better deal, saying something like, "Why should we risk our necks to help you fight Lord Saxton? What's really in it for the thieves' guild, other than a short, brutal end when you inevitably fail?"

Interest 0 ("No, and ...")

If an NPC's interest is 0, they offer nothing, refuse to negotiate further, and seek to harm the heroes. The NPC might attack immediately, or they could take a different approach, perhaps spreading malicious rumors about the characters, sending assassins after them, or otherwise making their lives difficult. If the heroes don't want to be at odds with the NPC, they'll need to offer a valuable gift or undertake a quest just to make amends.

It is impossible to continue a negotiation when an NPC's interest drops to 0.

Keep Going or Stop

If an NPC still has patience after making an offer and their interest is between 1 and 4, the heroes can make another argument to attempt to improve the deal. Alternatively, they can accept the offer and end the negotiation. Let the players drive this decision. You can always have an NPC show they have patience remaining by asking, "Is there anything else?"

If the NPC's patience is 0 or their interest is 5, then the offer the NPC makes is their final offer to the characters. The heroes can accept the offer or not, but either way, the negotiation ends.

If the NPC's interest is 0, the NPC ends the negotiation without accepting a deal. The heroes can walk away from a negotiation without accepting a deal at any time.

Sample Negotiation

After killing the true lord of Bedegar, the tyrannical Lord Saxton took over the barony's capital, and is presently gathering forces to march on the rest of Bedegar's settlements. The heroes recently saved Edmund, the true heir to Bedegar's throne, and are now attempting to build an army that can stand against Saxton and defeat the tyrant.

The heroes are engaging in a negotiation with Zola Honeycut, the human guildmaster of the Clock—a thieves' guild whose headquarters is located in Bedegar's capital. The guild openly opposed Saxton when he first seized power, but the tyrant was quick to crack down on all known members of the Clock, forcing them into hiding or hanging them as a warning to others. The heroes' hope is that they can convince Zola to support their armed resistance.

Zola's Negotiation Stats

Zola is neutral toward the heroes when the negotiation begins. She knows them only by reputation, though she understands that they too believe Saxton is a tyrant who must be stopped. However, standing up to that tyrant has cost her people dearly, and she's not sure she's ready to rejoin the fight. One wrong move could spell the end of the Clock!

Zola Honeycut Negotiation Stats

Interest: 2 Patience: 4 Impression: 3

Motivations

Benevolence: Zola's name, Honeycut, comes from the fact that she always gives her fellow thieves a bigger cut than her own on jobs.

Protection: The members of the Clock are the only family Zola's ever known. The guild's motto is "The Clock is always ticking" because they're always planning the next job and their ever-richer future. Zola doesn't want to be the guild's last master.

Pitfalls

Higher Authority: Zola has no interest in serving anyone other than herself, and she scoffs at the suggestion of taking orders.

Revelry: Zola is all business and has no time for frivolity, especially while living under Saxton's threat.

Roleplaying Zola

Zola is glad that people are finally opposing Lord Saxton, but is angry that no one rose up with the Clock months ago when the tyrant first staged his coup. She's passionate about protecting her people, quick to call out dangerous plans in arguments she doesn't like, and fast to praise statements she agrees with. She's not afraid to speak her mind to the heroes, knowing that they share her desire to see Saxton gone. She's just not sure she can risk more of her found family in the current fight.

Negotiation in Action

Here's how the negotiation with Zola might play out.

Director (Djordi): *The windows are boarded up, allowing no light to enter the seemingly abandoned Goat's Eye tavern. The whole place smells of charred wood, evidence of the fire that burned most of the building's interior three years ago. As the door shuts behind you, light from a hooded lantern on the opposite side of the tavern suddenly fills the room. Amid the blackened walls and pillars, you note where six burly ruffians flank your group on both sides. The human holding the lantern smiles. "Welcome. I'm Zola. Willoughby told me you were coming. Have a seat." She motions to a few crates arranged in a circle around a wide barrel.*

James (playing Korvo, a shadow): *I have a seat and say, "Korvo at your service, Ms. Honeycut. And these here are the finest companions a polder could ask for: Linn, Jorn, and Val."*

Director: *Zola nods to each of you in turn, then says, "You'll excuse me if I dispense with more pleasantries. These days, no place is safe for the Clock. We keep moving. So tell me, what are you here for?"*

Alyssa (playing Jorn, a tactician): *"We're building an army to take down Saxton once and for all."*

In this scenario, all the heroes have a Renown of 2 except for Jorn, who has a Renown of 3 and is therefore famous to Zola.

Director: *Zola gives a mirthless chuckle as she shakes her head. "Oh is that all? I have to tell you, I don't think the four of you stand much of a chance. Unless you're hiding a legion or two of dwarves in your pockets. Yes, you have Jorn the Mighty with you, but you'll need more than one famous warrior to win the day."*

Alyssa: *Ah! So she has heard of me at least! Thanks, Renown.*

Grace (playing Val, a conduit): *"We don't. But we do have Lord Edmund—the true heir to the Bedegar throne."*

Director: *Zola nods, impressed. "I'm glad the boy is safe, but that's all he is—a boy, not an army."*

Matt (playing Linn, a talent): *"He's a boy people will rally around. We have no army, but that's why we're here. We're planning on changing that. Can you spare any soldiers for our cause?"*

The negotiation officially starts. The heroes have stated what they want from Zola. The Director begins by prompting them to make an argument.

Director: *Zola leans back on her crate. "There it is. The Clock has sacrificed much against Saxton. Why should we risk more to help? No one was here to help us months ago when we stood up to tyranny."*

Alyssa: *I nod along as Zola speaks, listening before I say, "We didn't hear of your struggle until after Saxton had already hanged many of your brave people. We're here now. How can we help?"*

Before making an argument, Alyssa is attempting to learn what Zola's motivations are by simply asking. The Director decides to reveal one of Zola's motivations: protection.

Director: *"If I were to make a deal with you, and that's a big 'if,' I'd need assurances that you can end this. Proof would be even better. The protection of my people is my top priority. We can earn freedom from Saxton once we regain our strength."*

James: *Aha! I got this, folks. I stand atop my crate and say, "Well, we can surely offer that, Ms. Honeycut. We have convinced Lord Edmund to grant amnesty to any who swear to serve him." I'd like to roll a Presence test to convince her.*

Director: Hold it there, champ. Zola's eyes narrow as you speak, and she holds up a hand to cut you off. "I will not swear to serve any ruler, no matter how benevolent. I'll consider being a partner, but even that outlook is grim if you tell me again that I need to bend the knee."

Korvo inadvertently made an argument using a pitfall by appealing to a higher authority. The Director notes that Zola's interest drops to 1 and her patience drops to 3. Zola gave a pretty firm "No" response here, which is what an NPC with an interest of 1 would say. However, the Director phrased Zola's response in such a way that the heroes know they can keep making arguments if they wish, since her patience hasn't run out.

James: Sorry! I thought that'd work. Seems like higher authority is a pitfall for her.

Grace: Let's try to avoid any others. Val says, "We're sorry, Zola. We don't want to do anything else to offend you." I'd like to make an Intuition test and use my Read Person skill to gauge her reaction and try to discern any other pitfalls.

Director: Cool. Hard difficulty.

Grace: I got a 17! Success.

Director: Zola sits back, chuckling. "There's two things I can't stand—anyone telling me to kiss a ring and merry fools who would rather go drinking than fight for their freedom. Luckily, you're not the latter." You can tell that revelry also won't go over well with Zola.

The heroes now know both of Zola's pitfalls: higher authority and revelry.

Matt: Linn is going to say, "We're recruiting more than just the Clock. We have a good chance of recruiting the elves of the wode and the orcs of Forest Rend, and we're already training the people of Gravesford to put up a fight. If we strike before Saxton can fully build his forces, we all stand a better chance of survival. If you don't stand with us, Saxton will still come for you. He's already coming for you. The Clock stands less of a chance alone."

Director: I think that's a Reason test, since you're using logic to point out that you have a better chance together than on your own. It's easy too, since you're appealing to one of her motivations.

Matt: Great! Can I use Lead here, since I'm demonstrating our ability to bring people together?

Director: I'll allow it.

Matt: That's a 14!

Because Linn appealed to a motivation, Zola's interest increases to 2, and her patience drops to 2. The Director gives a "No, but ..." response based on Zola's interest. At this point, the heroes haven't promised anything, so she offers them something for free.

Director: Zola nods along as you speak. "You're correct, but I'm not sure I can spare the people. I'll tell you what I can do. I have spies watching Saxton still. I can give you information about his troops' movements. Will that suffice?"

The Director makes it clear in Zola's response that the negotiation can still continue if that's what the players want.

Alyssa: I don't think so, right?

James: No. We need an army.

Matt: Yeah, let's push it.

Grace: Agreed.

Alyssa: I wonder if we can try to figure out another one of her motivations.

James: Is there anything I know about Zola's reputation? I have the Criminal Underworld skill.

Director: Make a Reason test.

James: That's an 18! Success!

Director: Korvo would know that Zola got the name Honeycut because she's generous with the guild's earnings. She gives all her fellow thieves a nice cut of every job.

Korvo's success has revealed Zola's benevolence motivation.

James: Brilliant! I think I probably would've shared that with the group before this.

Director: Yeah, that makes sense.

Alyssa: Great. Jorm will say, "It would be worthwhile in other ways for your crew if you joined our side."

Director: Zola's interest is piqued. "What makes you say that?"

Alyssa: "Even before his coup, Saxton had a considerable amount of wealth. If he's deposed, those riches need to go somewhere. The Clock will get a cut—a honey of a cut, you might say. Edmund has also promised to share his family's fortune with any who stand with him against Saxton—no oath of fealty necessary. After the young lord reclaims the throne, that is."

Director: You're appealing to one of her motivations, so make a Presence test.

Alyssa: Can I use my Persuade skill too?

Director: Absolutely. And you gain an edge because you're famous to her.

Alyssa: I needed that edge. I got a 12!

Because Jorm appealed to a motivation, Zola's interest increases to 3, and her patience is reduced to 1. The Director gives a "Yes, but ..." response while making it clear that the negotiation can still continue.

Director: Zola contemplates this for a moment. She nods, "I'm starting to see the benefits. I think I can spare some folks to help you, but you have to help them first. See, my best warriors are locked up in Bedegar Keep. They're supposed to be hanged in two days. If you free them, I'll see to it they stand with you against Saxton. We were making a plan to free them ourselves but could frankly use the help."

Grace: We could push the Clock to do it themselves, but I can't see Val turning her back on people in need.

James: Hear, hear. I'm done pushing my luck on this one.

Matt: It'll mean less time to recruit the other troops, so we'd better work quickly.

Alyssa: Then we're in agreement. I offer a handshake to Zola. "You've got yourself a deal."

The heroes could have pushed for a better deal, but they're satisfied with the offer from Zola, so they accept her terms. The negotiation ends.