

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.

The rules here are meant to be read by players and Directors, so that both understand the rules of negotiation. 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. Think of it like learning a new system for combat, exploration, or investigation in an RPG. This set of rules provides a framework for roleplaying.

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–Deceive or Might–Intimidate test 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–Charm test.

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 organization 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–Intimidate test, 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 can 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 roll initiative.

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

If you've never played a game with a negotiation system like this, you might need to run it once or twice before you master it, similar to learning a new system for combat, exploration, or investigation in an RPG. While there are some new rules to learn, they facilitate roleplaying by allowing the heroes to beseech an NPC for aid and only rolling when they don't directly appeal to that NPC's motivations.

NEGOTIATION STATS

During negotiation, the Director assigns NPCs four temporary statistics—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.

FOR THE DIRECTOR: SHARING INTEREST AND PATIENCE

It's up to you as the Director to decide whether to share an NPC's interest or patience during a negotiation. Sometimes sharing this information can make an encounter more dramatic, with the players watching their progress rise and fall in real time. Other groups might find negotiation more fun, dramatic, and immersive if those exact numbers are hidden from the players.

In playtesting some groups loved seeing these statistics, and some groups didn't, just as some groups like knowing the Stamina of every creature in a battle and others prefer to keep the information private. Talk to your group about what they'd prefer.

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 their interest. Arguments that don't appeal to a motivation require a more difficult power roll. See [Making Arguments](#) 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.

An NPC can have any of the following twelve motivations.

BENEVOLENCE

An NPC with the benevolence motivation believes in sharing what they have with others. For NPCs in a negotiation, their charity is limited (otherwise they're likely to just give the heroes what they need). It may only extend to a specific group of people. A benevolent pirate captain might share their plunder freely with the rest of their crew, but they're still plundering! It could be that the NPC's charity is 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.

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. “If you lend us the Sword of Agathor, we will actually make Capital safer for your guild by using it to lay low your enemies.” “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 buried in 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 it could be that they are a naturally inquisitive person who just wants to understand all they can about the timescape.

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. “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 humans 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 may wish to liberate themselves or others from another authority.

Arguments that appeal to a freedom motivation contend that helping the heroes maintains or grants freedom to the NPC or other people. “I know you want to see 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 most anything else. Sometimes these NPCs are misers, like wyrms who hoard coins and gems never to spend or donate. Others flaunt their wealth, viewing it as a sign of their station in life. Greed-driven NPCs might even 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 may 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.

Arguments that appeal to a greed motivation contend that helping the heroes will increase the NPC’s wealth or assets. “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 see as above 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 does or does not fully understand, or a person the NPC sees as an authority figure but lacks the formal title, such as an older sibling or a personal, idolized hero.

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 heroes. “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.” Alternatively, a hero could appeal to this motivation by telling the NPC that if the higher authority were in the NPC’s position, they’d take the deal. “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 their definition of who or what is good and evil are subjective. A priest who venerates a god of nature may believe that all who protect plants and animals at any cost are righteous, and that those who harvest natural resources, like miners and lumberjacks, must die. Having a justice motivation doesn’t make you a kind or charitable person.

Arguments that appeal to a justice motivation position the heroes on the good side of the NPC’s sense of right and wrong. “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 see to it that when Saxton falls, the people 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 their mortal coil doesn't prevent them from being entered into history.

Arguments that appeal to a legacy motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes will increase the likelihood that people will talk about the NPC for centuries to come. "If you give us the vizier's itinerary, I'll compose a song about your brave risk and 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 normal 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 don't have peace and need help obtaining it, while others simply want their current status quo to be maintained.

Arguments that appeal to a peace motivation contend that helping the heroes will earn the NPC some peace ... at least for a little while. "You have a good thing going here. A little burglary 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 to some real community dangers, 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."

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 are world-traversing tyrants, and others are petty secretaries of village organizations and shrines.

Arguments that appeal to a power motivation contend that working with the heroes will increase or protect the NPC's power. "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."

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. Threatening that which the NPC protects doesn't go very far in a negotiation, but aiding in the protection from threats does. Almost everyone has friends or family they wish to protect, but an NPC with the protection motivation believes it is their job above all else to keep their charge safe.

Arguments the appeal to a protection motivation contend that helping the heroes better protects the NPC's charge. "Dead soldiers grow the necromancer's ranks. Total annihilation is the only way to defeat it. 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 what it is now." "I see your grandchild is hellbent on joining the service. I happen to have a magic suit of armor that could better 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 through parties, thrill-seeking, or indulging in other hedonistic activities. Getting pleasure out of life while spending time with people they like is paramount to them.

Arguments that appeal to the revelry motivation contend that striking a deal with the heroes will help the NPC get back to partying sooner, longer, or harder. "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 give me and my band here some invitations." "I know you don't want to forge five Chronokinesis Crowns. How's this? 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 it could be that they wish to payback the pain with interest. In many cases, the desire for vengeance is also a desire to deal death upon another, but it could be that the NPC wishes to pay back embarrassment, career failure, or some other pain without murder.

Arguments that appeal to the vengeance motivation contend that the NPC can payback their pain by helping the heroes. “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.”

PITFALLS

Pitfalls are methods of making arguments that spark ire, discomfort, shame, fear, or some other negative response in an NPC. Using a pitfall in a negotiation causes an NPC’s interest and patience to wane. Each NPC has at least one pitfall, and many have two or more.

Some NPCs get angry when someone tries to intimidate them. Others become uncomfortable if you flirt with them. Still others get bored while listening to braggadocious blowhards.

RELATED TO SKILLS

Each NPC pitfall shares the name of a skill that could be used while making an argument during negotiation (see [Making Arguments](#)). If the skill applies to the argument, whether or not the hero making the test has the skill, the NPC reacts poorly to the argument (see [Pitfall Used](#)). For example, if an NPC military general has Intimidate as a pitfall and a hero claims that the NPC must provide them with troops to battle a distant army of undead or watch their people die at the hands of zombies in the future, the Intimidate skill applies to the test. The NPC reacts poorly, insulted that the hero is trying to use fear tactics to get help.

The Negotiation Pitfalls table lists common pitfalls and the narrative reasons that NPCs might have a negative reaction to the use of arguments that could use these skills.

NEGOTIATION PITFALLS

Skill(s)	Narrative
Brag	The NPC values humility and thinks bragging is tacky and tasteless, or they get competitive and snarky with people who brag, taking it as a challenge.
Empathize	The NPC is uncomfortable sharing their emotions and being told what they feel, even if it is true.
Flirt	The NPC becomes flustered and embarrassed by flirtation, or they’re in a committed monogamous relationship and take offense when someone makes any sort of romantic overture.
Interrogate	The NPC gets defensive, insecure, or suspicious when questioned vehemently or probingly.
Intimidate	The NPC thinks intimidation is a bullying tactic and refuses to engage, or they get so overcome with fear that they reject what the hero is saying.
Lead	The NPC thinks of themselves as a leader or a lone wolf and immediately bristles if someone tries to tell them what to do or inspire them to action.
Music	The NPC thinks music is a distraction and frivolous, and using it as part of a serious discussion causes them to take the heroes less seriously.
Persuade	The NPC views buttering up and soft sells as tricks and insults to their intelligence.
Other Skills	When other skills are used in negotiation, it is typically because the hero wants to use the knowledge of an area of their expertise in an argument. This most commonly applies to Lore skills, but a hero might want to use the Climb skill to argue that borrowing a noble lady’s griffons could save them days of travel up the side of a mountain. If such a skill is a pitfall for an NPC, it’s likely because they find the specific subject encompassed skill is frustratingly boring, or they have a bad history or memory associated with the subject and get angry, sad, or otherwise uncomfortable when it is raised.

DECEIVE

You may have noticed the Deceive skill isn't listed on the Negotiation Pitfalls table—that's on purpose. Deceive is a pitfall that most NPCs would have—no one likes being lied to, especially when it comes to negotiations. However, this pitfall isn't listed because it doesn't work like bragging, flirting, or intimidation. When a hero successfully lies to an NPC, the NPC doesn't realize that tactic has been employed! It doesn't make sense that the Deceive skill would work the same way as other skills in negotiation. Instead, lies and deception during negotiation only have a penalty for a hero if the hero gets caught. See [Caught in a Lie](#) for more information.

NPCs CHANGE OVER TIME

Just like the heroes, NPCs in negotiations are complex individuals who can change over the course of a campaign. It's possible that the heroes might have to negotiate with the same NPC for several different favors over the course of a campaign. During that 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, the criminal might learn from working with the heroes and start robbing 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.

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.

STOP COMBAT, START NEGOTIATION

If a hero wants to halt combat to negotiate with the other side, they can make a severe Presence or other applicable test as a maneuver to stop combat and begin a negotiation. The test only has a chance of success if the Director believes the other side is willing and capable of negotiating. A villain with 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 at least 3.

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 challenging 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:

- *7 or lower:* The hero learns no information regarding the NPC's motivations or pitfalls.
- *8-10:* The hero learns one of the NPC's motivations or pitfalls (hero's choice) they don't already know.
- *11+:* The hero learns one of the NPC's motivations and, as a reward, one of the NPC's pitfalls they don't already know.

After making the test, the heroes can't make another test to determine the 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 clear bandits from a forest, hand over a piece of treasure, or slay 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 or a moral imperative to help. 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.

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 of an argument. The hero needs to add 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!" Now that's an argument. If a hero makes a half-argument, the NPC might follow up with some questions, such as, "Why do you say that?" or "What makes you think that's true?" to get the full argument from the hero.

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 above the table discussion, while others prefer being able to strategize as often as possible.

APPEAL TO MOTIVATION

If the 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 challenging test to attempt to sway the NPC with the argument. Depending on the argument, it could be a Reason, Intuition, or Presence test and it might use any applicable skill—most commonly an Interpersonal skill. The test has the following outcomes.

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- *7 or lower:* The NPC's patience decreases by 1.
- *8-10:* The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience decreases by 1.
- *11+:* The NPC's interest increases by 1, and as a reward, their patience doesn't change.

At the Director's discretion, a particularly well roleplayed or reasoned argument automatically counts as a tier 3 result without a test.

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.

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 severe test to appeal to the NPC. The test has the following outcomes.

Power Roll + Reason, Intuition, or Presence:

- *7 or lower*: The NPC's patience decreases by 1, and as a consequence, their interest decreases by 1.
- *8-10*: The NPC's patience decreases by 1.
- *11+*: The NPC's interest increases by 1, and their patience decreases by 1. (On a natural 12, the NPC's patience remains the same.)

Director can decide that the NPC's interest decreases further if they catch a hero who used the Deceive skill in a lie.

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

EVERYONE CAN PARTICIPATE

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

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 and is offended by the lie, and their interest decreases by an additional 1.

PITFALL USED

If the 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.

NPC RESPONSE AND OFFER

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

- An NPC responds positively if the heroes increase their interest. "That's an excellent point." "You've given me much to consider." "Fair enough." "Makes sense to me." Unless the NPC is deceitful, it should be clear to the heroes that their argument helped convince the NPC.
- They respond 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." Unless the NPC is deceitful, it should be clear to the heroes that their argument did more harm than good.
- They respond 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 that this argument isn't working and they should try a new tactic.

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.

FOR THE DIRECTOR: REASONS FOR DECEPTION

There are times that an NPC may not want to show the heroes how well their arguments are working. For instance, if the heroes have dropped an NPC's interest so low that they now intend to harm the player characters, the NPC may falsely agree to what the heroes ask as part of a trap. Likewise, a greedy NPC may try to keep their enthusiasm for a deal concealed while their interest is high to get more money or favors from the heroes. If a hero thinks an NPC is attempting to fool them, they can make an Intuition test. If the hero succeeds, they learn their true standing with the NPC.

INTEREST 5 ("YES, AND . . .")

If the NPC's interest is 5, they offer everything the heroes initially asked for—and then sweetens the deal. This result is 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 Saxton, and then offer the heroes a quiver filled with explosive arrows to give them an additional +1 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, the NPC offers the heroes everything they asked for without sweetening the deal. The NPC also accepts anything the heroes have offered as part of the deal with this result. For example, if the heroes offered to help spring a guild thief from prison in exchange for the thieves guild’s elite assassins 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 Lord 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 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 the 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 an expensive gift or undertake a quest just to make amends.

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

FOR THE DIRECTOR: CREATING RESPONSES AND OFFERS

When you’re preparing a negotiation, think of at least two specific asks that the NPC could make of the heroes. Then you’re prepared if the heroes ask what they can do for the NPC and you want to give a response, or if the NPC’s interest becomes 3. These asks could be specific items the heroes have or can obtain (such as a magic sword or psionic crystal), or they might be favors in the form of adventuring (such as slaying a dragon or rescuing a village from a siege).

You should also have at least two specific ways the NPC can help the heroes beyond what they’re asking for. These can be used if the NPC’s interest becomes 2, to give the heroes something that can help them that isn’t what they asked for—or if the NPC’s interest rises to 5, to give the heroes something extra in addition to what they asked for. This help could take the form of supernatural items or the assistance of a companion or retainer. It might be hidden information that the heroes don’t yet know, and which can help them with their overall goal. Or perhaps it’s a less impactful version of what the heroes initially asked for. If the heroes ask an ancient dragon for help storming a castle, the dragon might offer the services of their younger, less powerful offspring instead of their own assistance . . . or in addition to it!

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

The heroes are gathering forces to build an army that can stand against the tyrannical Lord Saxton. Saxton killed the true lord of Bedegar. He took over the barony's capital and is gathering forces to march on the rest of Bedegar's settlements. The heroes saved Edmund, the true heir to Bedegar's lordship, and are gathering an army of their own allies to battle Saxton's forces.

The heroes first negotiate with Zola Honeycut, the human guildmaster of the Clock, a thieves' guild with headquarters 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 from the end of a noose.

The heroes hope they can convince Zola to support their armed resistance and rejoin the fight.

ZOLA'S NEGOTIATION STATS

Zola is neutral to the heroes when the negotiation begins. She doesn't know them, but agrees that Saxton is nothing more than a bully and a tyrant. 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: 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 only family Zola's ever known is the Clock. The guild's motto is "The Clock is always ticking," because they're always planning the next job and never intend to stop existing. Zola doesn't want to be the guild's last master.

Pitfalls

- **Brag:** Zola believes that deeds speak for themselves, and that braggarts are nothing more than insecure exaggerators.
- **Interrogate:** Zola shuts down when people start to question her. She's spent too much time in holding cells answering hostile questions to do so of her own free will.

ROLEPLAYING BARGNOT

Zola is glad that people are finally opposing Lord Saxton, but 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's not afraid to speak her mind to the heroes, because she knows they'd both like to see Saxton gone, she's just not sure she can risk more of her found family in the current fight.

SAMPLE NEGOTIATION DIALOGUE

Here's how the negotiation with Zola might play out. In this scenario, Alyssa is playing Jorn the tactician, Grace is playing Val the conduit, James is playing Korvo the shadow, and Matt is playing Linn the talent.

Director: *The windows are boarded up, allowing no light to enter the seemingly-abandoned Goat's Eye tavern. The whole place smells like 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 an opening hooded lantern on the opposite side of the tavern suddenly fills the room. Amid the blackened walls and pillars, you see that six burly ruffians flank either side of your group. 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): *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, only safer for the Clock. We keep moving. So tell me, what are you here for?"*

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

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."*

Grace (playing Val): *"We don't, but we do have Lord Edmund—true heir to 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): *"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 begins. 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?"*

Jorn is attempting to learn what Zola's motivations are before making an argument 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 thing. 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. You're talking to the Heroes of Gravesford, the local legends who saved Forest Rend from the forces of Saxton's dog, Sir Pelliton. If anyone can keep you safe against Saxton, it's us!" I'd like to roll a Presence test to convince her, and I'm gonna get a +1 because of my Brag skill.*

Director: *Hold it there, champ. Zola's eyes narrow as you boast, and she holds up a hand to cut you off. "I don't care what you've done. I care about what you're going to do. Tell me about the future, or get out."*

Korvo made an argument using a pitfall! The Director notes that Zola's interest drops to 1 and her patience drops to 2. 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 bragging is a pitfall.*

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 to see if I can discern any other pitfalls.*

Director: *Cool. Challenging difficulty.*

Grace: *I got a 9! Success.*

Director: *Zola sits back, chuckling. "There's two things I can't stand—braggarts and overly zealous watch officers asking questions every other second. Luckily, you're not the latter." You can tell that interrogating Zola also won't go over well.*

The heroes now know both of Zola's pitfalls: Brag and Interrogate.

Linn: *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 orc 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 force, 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 you have a better chance together than on your own. It's challenging too, since you're appealing to one of her motivations.*

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

Director: *I'll allow it.*

Linn: *That's an 11!*

Because Linn appealed to a motivation, Zola's interest increases to 2, and her patience remains at 2. The Director gives a "No, but ..." response. At this point, the heroes haven't promised anything, so she offers them something for free. The Director makes it clear in her response that the negotiation can still continue if that's what the players want.

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 some spies watching Saxton still. I can give you information about his troops' movements. Will that suffice?"*

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 challenging Reason test.*

James: *That's an 8! Success!*

Director: *Korvo would know that Zola got the name Honeycut, because she is 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. I'll 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 honeycut. Edmund also has promised to share his family's fortune with any who stand with him against Saxton ... after the young lord reclaims it, that is."*

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

Alyssa: *Can I use my Persuade skill too?*

Director: *Absolutely.*

Alyssa: *I got a 10!*

Because Jorn 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 better work quickly.*

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

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