



Much of what I say will be based on what I personally find appealing about Star Trek, but I'm sure that many of you will share my feelings. In sum, if I can't seek out new life and new civilizations and boldly go where no man has gone before, then something important is missing from a Star Trek game.

THE BOARDGAMES

As with the vast majority of boardgames, the Star Trek boardgames (and there are many) are mostly simulations of military conflicts. The runaway bestseller of all Star Trek boardgames is Task Force Games' *Star Fleet Battles*, a complex simulation of everything about starship combat, including Orion suicide ships (remember that from "Journey To Babel"?), cloaking devices, and clever maneuvers only the noblest of Federation commander can pull off. If you always wanted to captain a Federation heavy cruiser in combat against a Klingon battlecruiser, then this is the game for you. Task Force has gone a few steps further by introducing starships and alien species never before seen by Star Trek fans.

Unfortunately, I have problems with much of this. First, I always feel disoriented when playing *Star Fleet Battles*, since there are many unfamiliar ships. Certainly Star Fleet needs more than the *Enterprise*-like exploration cruisers, but futuristic versions of aircraft carriers? Federation ships firing missiles? And new generations of super-dreadnoughts which make the *Enterprise* look like the Caspar Milquetoast of the galaxy? And who the hell are the Lyrans, Hydrans, and Andromedans?

Star Fleet Battles is even more disorienting for the same philosophical difference I have with all the purely militaristic Star Trek games: the message of the Star Trek TV show was that brute force was a simple-minded, uncivilized, and inhumane solution

COMPARING STAR Trek games is difficult, since they span the range of gaming possibilities, from computer gaming to boardgaming to role-playing. There is a single standard of judgment, however, which works for them all: How effective is any given game at capturing the appeal of Star Trek, that undefined "something" which keeps us watching the show, even in endless reruns?

STAR TREK GAMES

Or how to get yourself into the Final Frontier

By Thomas A. Grant

to problems. Force was used only as a last resort, as was the case in the episode "Balance Of Terror," in which Captain Kirk played a lethal cat & mouse game with a Romulan warship. If the *Enterprise* had lost the battle, the Romulan ship would have reported that Federation defenses were weak, and the Romulans would have started a new war against the peaceful, civilized citizens of the Federation. A game based purely on starship combat—a rare occurrence in itself and always something of an aberration—loses something important about Star Trek in the translation.

Still, *Star Fleet Battles* and its kin, Gamescience's *Star Fleet Battle Manual* and FASA's Starship Duel series, can be a lot of fun—if you enjoy the nail-biting suspense of starship combat. *Star Fleet Battles* presents many fascinating tactical problems to those with a wargamer's heart, but I suggest that, due to the extreme complexity of the game, you begin with the excellent *Introduction to Star Fleet Battles*, a much simpler game which takes you step-by-step through the basics of the larger, more complex game. It has a fun format, too, in which you begin as a Star Fleet cadet and work your way through the scenarios to "graduation." Each new scenario introduces you to another set of rules, and after several games you will have mastered the complexity as well as the tactics needed to be a good player.

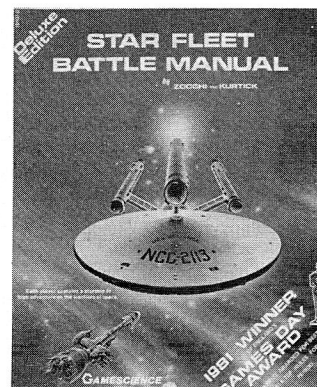
If you enjoy something simpler, get one of the Starship Duel games from FASA, which will allow you to wage fast and very dirty fights between two ships. The combat system is simple, and you'll want to play another quick game as soon as you've finished one. FASA has manufactured two sets, each with two ships, and with a little modification you can

play with other classes of starships, too.

Gamescience's *Star Fleet Battle Manual* is a simpler version of *Star Fleet Battles*, but since you're more likely to find players for the latter, I suggest you invest in *Star Fleet Battles*. There's more material published for *Star Fleet Battles* too, from new scenarios to new ship classes (if that intrigues you).

Of all the boardgames, by far the best at duplicating the spirit of Star Trek are West End's three entries into the field, *The Enterprise Encounter*, *Star Trek: The Adventure Game*, and *Star Trek III: Exploring New Worlds*. Both *The Enterprise Encounter* and *The Adventure Game* walk the players through the plots of the Star Trek shows—with changes, of course. In *The Enterprise Encounter*, two to four players attempt to save the *Enterprise* and her crew of 430 from the deranged Trelayne, self-styled Squire of Gothos (remember him?), by making many life & death decisions. In my favorite of the two, *The Adventure Game*, you can play the captain of a Federation or Klingon exploration mission in uncharted space. In both games, when faced with familiar situations, expect the unexpected. What would happen if the crew of the *Enterprise* told Trelayne to buzz off and leave them alone? And how would the Klingons have handled Charlie X?

Star Trek III offers three games in one. First, you can try to bring a fellow starship captain to justice for breaking the Prime Directive and setting himself up as the satrap of a planet in the equivalent of the Dark Ages. In this very easy to learn but hard to win game, you must don the garb of the Merry Men to bring peace to this troubled planet. The idea is fairly corny, but the game has enough fun and suspense to sus-



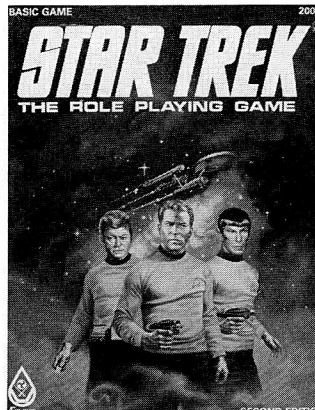
tain interest. The second mini-game, "Free Enterprise," pits the crew of the *Enterprise* against their Klingon counterparts in a trade war. Can Kirk and his gallant crew beat the Klingons in the ruthless game of buying and selling thrint whistles and gleebers? I would suggest this game only to those with Mammon's heart and a lot of patience. The whims of the market are capricious and it is difficult to beat the Klingons at ruthless dealing and double-dealing, especially when they have pirates patrolling the space lanes.

The best game in *Star Trek III* is the Kobayashi Maru simulation from the second Star Trek movie, in which you must journey into Klingon space to save the crew of a wrecked freighter. This game is challenging, exciting, and a real knuckle-buster. You'll play this again and again, if only to get close to winning.

COMPUTER GAMES

The very first computer game was based on Star Trek, in which you piloted the *Enterprise* through different quadrants of space to stop a Klingon invasion. Although this relatively simple program seems primitive in comparison with the computer games of today, there is still some charm about the old Star Trek game in its many incarnations. By far the best version of this game was *Super Stellar Trek*, in which not only did you warp through space and fire phasers and photon torpedoes at hapless Klingon ships, but you could also explore planets for dilithium crystals, fly around (and, if you were very courageous, through) black holes, and test the Federation's new death ray if you got into a particularly difficult pinch.

Unfortunately, there have been almost no Star Trek computer games since then. A version of the arcade Star Trek game is available for home computer, but like all shoot 'em ups, the arcade game loses its appeal quickly. Two games, *Star Fleet* and *Cosmic Encounter*, look suspiciously like Star Trek simulations, but the



names are changed to protect the manufacturers from paying beautiful royalties.

Fortunately, there is one excellent Star Trek "adventure game," *The Kobayashi Alternative*. As in all "adventure" or "interactive fiction" games, you type in commands and the computer tells you the result. In *The Kobayashi Alternative*, you play all of the *Enterprise* crew as you investigate several inhabited planets in search of a lost Federation exploration ship. There's a lot of intrigue and many puzzles to solve, and best of all, it actually feels like a Star Trek episode! You can even take a walk around the *Enterprise* to get the feel of the vessel you're commanding as Admiral Kirk (alias, you).

With all the amazing talent in the software field, I've always been surprised that no one has really taken on the challenge of making a superior Star Trek game. *The Kobayashi Alternative* is the first, but I'm sure that the people responsible for such programming marvels as *Ultima*, *Wizardry*, *The Bard's Tale*, *Sundog*, and the like, might be tempted to write a game in which, in full color and with sound effects and music, you can seek out new life forms, etc. I'm sure that the biggest obstacle to this is not the combined Romulan-Klingon menace, but something even more insidious, copy-right problems. Still, a superior Star Trek game might be an enormous money-maker. . . .

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Role-playing games have greatly matured since the first *Dungeons & Dragons* rules, and for practically every field of fantasy, science fiction, mystery, horror, or adventure novel or film, there's a role-playing game. The only Star Trek role-playing game, made by FASA, does an excellent job of simulating the show and the movies, while capturing that special Star Trek appeal I discussed in the beginning of this article.

As in all role-playing games, you need a referee (who plots the scenario, creates gamemaster char-

acters, and tells the other players the consequences of their actions) and several players. Having more than one or two players is important, since it's hard to play an entire starship crew or even a landing party yourself. (It's hard enough to switch between Scottish and Russian accents when playing the standard *Enterprise* crew!) For maximum enjoyment, you need several players, for added brainpower as well as characterization. After all, we grew to love Star Trek for the characters, so if you choose the role-playing game, you will get the greatest enjoyment by strengthening the characterization of the imaginary people whose persona you will borrow for a few hours.

FASA's basic *Star Trek* role-playing set is easy to learn, though it may be a bit menacing for beginners. Don't panic: role-playing is easier than it looks. There are lots of rules, but you don't need to memorize all of them. Your most important job is to run your player-character. If you understand that in each skill area (such as Navigation or Vulcan Nerve Pinch) you have a certain percentage chance of success (such as 45% each time you try a nerve pinch), then you will do just fine. After all, the play's the thing.

If you still have problems, FASA provides a good introduction to the game for beginners, and walks the player through the creation of a sample character, Lee Sterling. When you create a character, you make their career decisions as they advance through the Star Fleet Academy, determining whether they will become an absent-minded science officer or a lantern-jawed starship captain. If you want to play the crew of the *Enterprise*, then their character descriptions are all available in the basic set. If you have perverse tastes, FASA even has produced supplements which tell players how they can create and run Romulan and Klingon player-characters!

FASA has also done us all a ser-

vice by providing comprehensive and well-organized background material on the Star Trek universe. Although I've been a fan for years, I can't always remember the names of some of the medical thingamajigs in McCoy's medical pouch, or all the extraordinary abilities of Vulcans. There is also an excellent section explaining what is expected of starship crews—when to fire on suspicious alien vessels, in what cases the Prime Directive applies, etc. The manuals are well-organized, and it's usually a simple task to find some rule or fact which you can't remember.

FASA also produces a cornucopia of pre-written scenarios, minimizing the work for already-exhausted referees. One of the worst problems for me is finding the time to write a scenario (which takes at least several hours to do well), so pre-made scenarios are a godsend. Most of FASA's Star Trek scenarios are good, and some are excellent. Most have a level of intrigue, a mystery to unravel, and a chance for real adventure in the final frontier. A good example is *The Vanished*, which pits the *Enterprise* crew against a difficult puzzle: where did the scientists in a deep-space research station go when they suddenly disappeared? And what are those strange, slug-like aliens slithering around the abandoned research facility?

In some of the scenarios, FASA picks up plot lines from the TV show: for example, the Gorn commander in *A Matter Of Honor* is the same unlikable reptile which Captain Kirk fought in the TV episode "Duel." Similarly, in *A Doomsday Like Any Other*, the players must defeat another planet-killer like the one defeated by the *Enterprise* in the episode "The Doomsday Weapon," while at the same time fending off a task force of meddlesome Romulan ships.

As is the case with all role-playing games, the key to enjoying *Star Trek: The Role Playing Game* is finding a good group

with which to play. Since characterization, plot, and the creation of a "sense of wonder" are integral to the Star Trek experience, you need imaginative, good-natured, and intelligent players to fully enjoy this game. You also need a good referee, someone to design and run the scenarios as well as maintain order and continuity from one gaming session to another. Before investing in the game, I suggest you find some other players; experience in Star Trek or other role-playing games is not required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If you're looking for the best simulation of Star Trek, look into FASA's role-playing game. It has everything, from characterization to exploration to confrontation. If you buy the deluxe edition of *Star Trek: The RPG*, you will also receive FASA's starship combat game, which links the role-playing game to the slam-bang action of ship-to-ship combat in the Star Trek universe. The starship combats in this system are faster and bloodier than in *Star Fleet Battles* and each player on the bridge crew (science officer, navigator, engineer, etc.) has his or her own console to man, under the overall direction of the starship captain. With *Star Trek: The RPG*, you and a few other people can enter completely the exciting world of Star Trek.

If you don't have many friends interested in Star Trek gaming but you do own a home computer, buy *The Kobayashi Alternative*. It's a lot of fun, a real challenge, and best of all, it's the first of a series of Star Trek computer games. If you don't have other players or a computer, get *Star Trek III* or *Star Trek: The Adventure Game*, both of which can be played solitaire.

Finally, if you're primarily interested in starship combat, your best purchase is *Introduction to Star Fleet Battles*. After you have mastered this game, you can move on to *Star Fleet Battles*, which captures all the complexities of starship battles. It spans the gamut of possibilities from a duel between two starships to major fleet actions.

The best thing about the market of Star Trek games is that there is something to appeal to everyone's tastes. There are even Star Trek miniatures, lead models of the ships from the series and the movies as well as the new ships introduced in *Star Fleet Battles* and *Star Trek: The RPG*.

In other words, there's a large universe out there for you and your friends to explore. And there's more to Star Trek games than a double fizzbin. □