

... Where No Review Has
Gone Before

STAR TREK: THE ROLE- PLAYING GAME

Featured Review

by William A.
Barton

"Space . . . the Final Frontier." For three seasons in the late '60s on prime-time TV – (and ever since in syndication) – these words heralded into our homes an hour of adventure, excitement and human drama: *Star Trek*, perhaps one of the most important TV phenomena of all time.

Almost from the start there were numerous attempts to translate *Star Trek* into game terms, most meeting with questionable success. Among the first valid attempts was Gamescience's *Star Fleet Battle Manual*, a set of miniature rules to go along with the company's line of Star Fleet ships. *Star Trek* equipment or terminology in one shape or another began to appear in some of the earlier of the SFRPGs, *Space Patrol* and *Starship & Spacemen* being two of note.

The first real attempt at a *Star Trek* role-playing game came from Heritage Models, whose *Star Trek (Adventure Gaming in the Final Frontier)*, was an "official" ST RPG, licensed from Paramount Pictures, to go along with its licensed line of 25 mm *Star Trek* figures. The problem was that rules were created primarily to help sell the miniatures, not provide a full role-playing system. And the most popular *Star Trek* boardgame is, of course, Task Force's *Star Fleet Battles*. (Of note is the fact that *SFB*, like its Gamescience predecessor, is licensed through the Franz Joseph designs, and not through Paramount.)

With all the bigger game companies struggling to come up with a science fiction RPG that could successfully lock light-sabers with *Traveller*, it was left to FASA, the small company that started life as a *Traveller* licensee, to

somehow secure the rights to the one SFRPG that could possibly have a shot: *Star Trek – the Role-Playing Game*. The official game of the *Star Trek* universe is licensed, like its Heritage predecessor, from Paramount Pictures. And to those who have long been looking for a way in which to simulate the adventure, the drama, and the human (and non-human) interaction of the series in game form, I think I can say that this is it.

I don't know how much FASA is paying in licensing fees for the right to produce this game, but I'm certain it must be a considerable sum. And it was doubtless a risk for a company of FASA's size. If *Star Trek – the Role-Playing Game* doesn't do well, it could mean a serious financial loss. Yet after looking over the game – the overall design, the artwork, the systems, – and playing it, I'd be willing to say it was money well spent. In fact, I'll go out on a pylon and predict that *Star Trek* will become one of the most popular SFRPGs in recent years. It may not beat out *Traveller*, but it could conceivably give the champ a run for its credits.

Components

Everything about this game is top quality. Most of the artwork and graphics are quite striking – especially the detail work on the deck plans of the *U.S.S. Enterprise* and the Klingon D-7 battlecruiser included with the set. These deck plans are absolutely beautiful – the finest FASA (or anyone else) has ever produced. Every console, every chair, every piece of permanent equipment, from the diagnostic beds in sick bay to the transporter disks, is depicted in detail. The *Enterprise* and D-7 plans show top, side, forward and rear external views and plans of every deck, each with a 1/4" square grid at a scale of six meters to one inch. (The earlier-announced 15 mm-scale plans have been released separately; their inclusion in this package would have undoubtedly run the price up beyond most gamers' budgets.) The last third of the scenario book provides a deck-by-deck key to the plans, including the variations on the D-7 as used by the Romulans.

The only aspect of the plans that jarred me is the location of the *Enterprise*'s photon

torpedo tubes on top of the primary hull; in the show, unless memory fails me, the torps were always shown emerging from the underside of the dish. Some problems might emerge from the fact that decks are printed on both sides of the sheet. Particularly if actions occur on several decks at once. A number of the larger decks are cut up among as many as four sheets. And it is annoying that the deck plans are printed in nonrepro blue, which most copiers won't print. I can understand FASA's reasons for this: After so much work, they certainly don't want countless pirate copies of their deck plans floating around. Still, the plans are so beautiful, I personally hate to drag them out for play sessions where less careful gamers might spill their drinks or drop burning ashes on them (shudder!).

The rulebook and scenario book are liberally decorated throughout with black and white stills from the series, including a four part photo record of a security man (you know, the guys with the red shirts that might as well have a bullseye and "Phaser Fodder" printed on the front) being disintegrated.

The only disappointment as far as the game's production goes is the counters provided with the set. These are nicely drawn and colored, with tiny but recognizable Star Fleet and alien character figures on one side and ship silhouette and systems status markers on the other. However, the two sides are slightly misregistered, so that the tops of the heads of the Gorn figures and some others are cut off.

Character Generation

Before discussing the mechanics of character generation, I think it appropriate to note that this game is set during the time of the original five-year mission of the *Enterprise*, and not that of either movie. This, I believe, was the correct decision on the part of the game's designers. This allows the players to portray members of the crew of the *Enterprise* (including the series stars and regulars) during their heyday rather than as the aging folks of the movies, or to actually interact with the *Enterprise*, hearing of that ship's adventures via sub-space radio or at the local starbase, should the players



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opt to up roll their own characters as the crew of some other ship. And no need to worry about V-ger or the Genesis Device . . . or how to revive Spock before *STIII*.

Character generation is relatively simple. Characters have seven attributes, all of which will be familiar to experienced role players: Strength, Endurance, Intelligence, Dexterity, Charisma, Luck and Psionic Potential. Initial values are determined by rolling 3D10+40 for all attributes except Luck and Psionics (which are determined by D100 rolls), and adding certain racial modifiers for the various attributes, depending on whether your character is human, Vulcan, Andorian, Caitian, Edoan or Tellerite (player-characters may not be Klingon, Romulan, etc., though a future supplement will allow this). Vulcans, for example, get adds to Strength, Endurance and Intelligence and must subtract from Luck (Vulcans are logical, not lucky), while humans, like all non-Vulcans, must subtract from Psionics. As a final factor, percentile dice are rolled and the result, divided by two, is awarded to the character's attributes.

Gaining skills for the character is pretty straightforward, too. Most skills are gained in Star Fleet Academy, though a character may be able to gain levels in Pre-academy skills. In the Academy, the character gains a set number of skill points in general Star Fleet skills and their levels are all predetermined. The character also gets ten skill rolls of 1D10 (plus bonuses for high intelligence) in *any* skill the player chooses. Further skill rolls will become available during the mandatory cadet cruise(s) following Academy graduation, optional attendance of Command School (required for future captains or department heads), and through terms of service prior to the character's entry into play. The length of the latter will depend on what role in the game and what rank the player has chosen for his character.

The only (minor) problem I see in the generation system is the lack of any restrictions on the character's attending Command School or the number of years of prior service he may choose to gain extra skill levels (though there is a loss of attribute points when a certain age is reached). Naturally, players will go as far as possible to gain the most experienced characters they can. Of course, this is *Star Trek*, and it's more fun being an experienced ship's captain than an ensign fresh out of the Academy with little say in the running of the adventure.

Still, the referee will have to be careful to coordinate the generation efforts of his players so as not to end up with three science officers or several captains or helmsmen and no Uhuras or McCoys.

A quick word on skills: Every skill that would seem necessary for a Star Fleet character has been included here and at least adequately explained. Especially nice is the catch-all skill of Trivia, which allows a character to have knowledge in any area not covered, from ancient Terran literature to Vulcan history. In the referee's section on generating NPCs from the nonplayer races, and in the section of pregenerated familiar ST characters, a few non Star Fleet skills are also covered, from the Klingons' nasty Interrogation skill to the Courtesan skill of the green Orion Slave Women.

Players wishing to portray the familiar series stars will find all the *Enterprise* regulars completely generated, along with minor characters such as Cyrano Jones, Harry Mudd and even Khan (for those wishing to reenact *Wrath*). For the most part, Kirk, Spock and the others seem well-conceived and faithful to the series, though I'm certain all dedicated Trekkers will have their own ideas about this. A few seem to have some skills missing, and the "to hit" values have been overlooked on Scotty's rundown ("I kinna do it, captain!"). It'll be a surprise to may, I think, that Uhura comes across as a better combatant than Chekov, and Rand is a better shot than McCoy!

One last annoyance here is that the character record sheet is printed in the rulebook rather than being available as a separate sheet. The way the book is bound (perfect-bound rather than saddle-stitched), it is impossible to copy the record sheet for personal use without breaking the back of the book or cutting out the page (the back of which begins the next section).

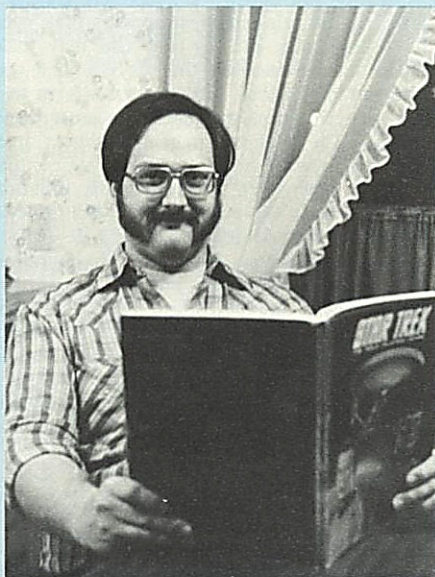
Combat and Movement

The combat/movement system of *Star Trek - The Role-Playing Game* will be familiar to anyone who has played *Snapshot*. As in that game, all movement takes place on a square grid of one-half-inch to 1.5 meters. Characters move and perform actions in combat situations by expending Action Points. Each character has a number of Action Points (APs) equal to his Dexterity score divided by 10, rounded down, plus 4. This is the amount he may spend every

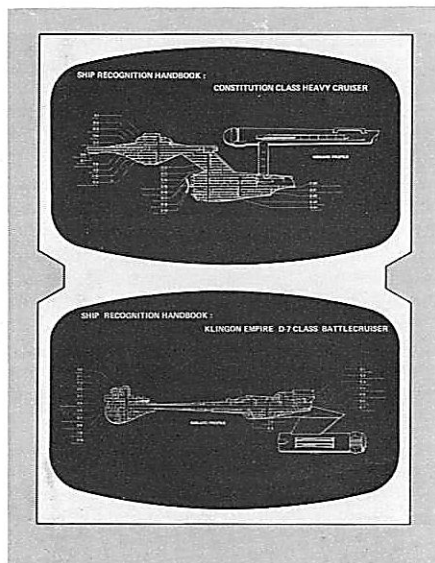
ten-second combat round to move, fire a weapon, engage in hand-to-hand combat and so on. Each action costs a set number of APs. While not exhaustive, the list of actions covers most movement/combat options players will come up (with an important exception noted below), with a catch-all "Operate familiar device" and the referee's ingenuity to cover any others.

Unlike in *Snapshot*, however, a character isn't required to spend all his APs in his turn; he may save some to use as opportunity actions, which may occur during any other character's or NPC's turn. Certain movements are noted in the AP cost chart as opportunity actions that may be used in this manner. Firing a gun, dive rolling, parrying a blow and speaking a short sentence, for example, are all opportunity actions, though most movement actions are not.

Determining a hit in *Star Trek* is easily accomplished. Two aspects of the character come into play here: his dexterity score and his skill level in the weapon/combat skill being used. Unlike most skills, where the straight value is rolled on percentile dice, the combat skill level is averaged with the character's dexterity to determine the value he must roll under to hit. This is further modified by a list of various adjustments for the target's status (size, movement, etc.) and the attacker's status (using two weapons or the wrong hand, etc.) and the range to get the final number that must be rolled under on D100 for a hit. If a hit takes place, damage is removed from a character's Endurance stat; if that stat falls below one-half-End and the character fails a saving roll, or if his unconsciousness threshold (End/10) is reached due to accumulated damage, the character is unconscious. If End is reduced below 0, the character is mortally injured and will die unless he receives aid from a qualified medic. Damage is divided into wound damage, which takes a while to heal (even with medical advances), and temporary damage - stuns, etc. - that heals much faster. Since weapons in *Star Trek* do a lot of damage (a phaser on stun does 75 points of temporary damage, 150 of wound damage on disrupt - more than enough to kill the strongest character), it's good that the designers added a luck saving roll for player-characters that may reduce damage from energy weapons by as much as a third. That and the medical rules give even the most foolhardy characters a chance to



(l-r) *Star Trek* designers Guy W. McLimore, Jr., Greg Poehein, and David Tepool.



Recognition Handbook.

survive long enough to learn a lesson.

There are problems with the combat system in *Star Trek*. The rules for the recovery of damage points are not as clear as they could be. The to-hit modifiers are not as complete as they might be. For example, while there are modifiers for the target's movement, there are none for the attacker's. (Even a highly trained individual will find it harder to hit a target when he's moving than when he's standing still.)

The worst omission involves an unarmed character in melee with one armed with a club or blade. If both characters are unarmed or both have melee weapons, a character can use an opportunity action to parry his opponent's blow. If the attacker is armed, however, and the character isn't, no parry is allowed. Neither is any other action under the system, since movement is not an opportunity action (where it is, it isn't applicable in such a case). As it stands, when Kang swings a chair at Kirk, our hero has to stand still and hope the Klingon misses. Obviously some sort of Dodge action should have been included here. Such an action is simply worked out, I've already done so and sent a copy to FASA, and a letter from them assured me the action or a comparable one would be appearing in a future supplement.

The *Star Trek* Universe

A lot of pains have gone into making the game as faithful to the established *Star Trek* mythos as possible. The designers obviously did their research. All of the important races from the series (including the animated episodes) are represented as character or NPC races, the sole exceptions being the Kzinti and other one-shot races such as the Skorr. Perhaps these will be covered in a future expansion, though the designers have declared the Kzinti out of bound, as they feel the felinoids should stay in Larry Niven's *Known Space* universe from which they were borrowed. Most of the items of equipment in standard use on the series is covered for use by players and their opponents, with quite adequate extrapolations where the series was silent, as with the Gorn blaster. The rules for generating Class M planets for characters to explore is competently handled, as are those for populating them with new civilizations and lifeforms.

The historical update of the United Federation of Planets and the organizational data for Star Fleet are also nicely and accurately handled, further giving the game an authentic *Star Trek* flavor.

Starship Combat

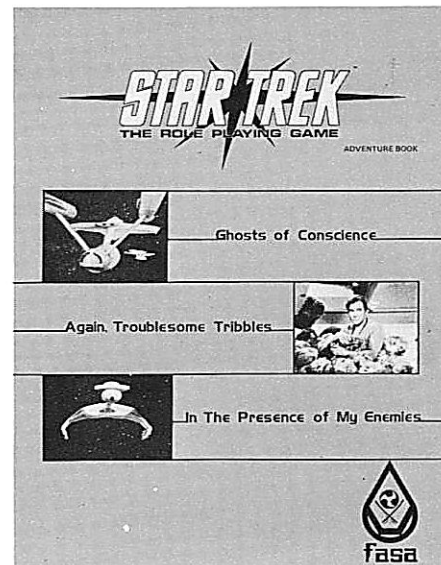
Those who were afraid that the starship combat system in *STTRPG* would merely be a simplified rehash of *Star Fleet Battles* can breathe a sigh of relief. For perhaps the first time in a SFRPG, space combat will not be a boring experience for all but a few of the players. Unlike *Traveller* and other games, where only the pilot, gunners and perhaps the computer operator have much to do, here all the players are involved in ship-to-ship battles. Each department head except the Captain and Medical Officer has a console to operate. These are 8½" x 11" (or 11" x 17" in the case of the Engineer) sheets with boxes for counters to mark the status of the various systems for which the department head is responsible. When the ship is in combat, the Chief Engineer is responsible for actually allocating how much energy from the warp and impulse engines goes to each other system for use in movement on screens and for weapons; the Science Officer operates sensors and keeps track of damage to the ship (the damage tables are on his sheet as well); the Communications Officer keeps track of casualties and their effects of operations; the Navigator operates the deflector screens and tractors; and the Helmsman determines speed and movement and fires phasers and photon torpedos at the Captain's orders (weapon firing charts are on his sheet, too). Though without a console, the Captain is responsible for making all command decisions and conveying these to his various department heads to carry out on their consoles.

While the players man their consoles in combat, the referee uses a simplified console arrangement to run the enemy ship, with all functions appearing on a single sheet. The game includes GM consoles for all the enemy ships covered in the rules — Klingon D-7, Romulan Bird of Prey, Gorn Cruiser and Orion Blockade Runner — and several of the other Star Fleet vessels mentioned.

While the starship combat rules are usually easily followed and work well, there are a few flaws. As the rules stand, it appears that, while the enemy ship run by the GM may make repairs during combat, the players must wait until out of combat to repair damage to their ship — a situation that could be most inconvenient. The Helmsman seems almost overwhelmed in what he has to do during combat. It might have been better had his functions been split up a bit, perhaps giving the torpedos to the Navigator. And there are a few places where it seems saving throws on ship operations skills should be necessary but aren't, and other places where the rules are vague, requiring referee interpretation. But overall, while a bit cumbersome in places, the starship combat rules are some of the best currently available in SFRPG Gaming and add more to individual involvement and excitement in space combat than any other on the market.

Scenarios

Before concluding, I should mention at least briefly the scenarios included with the game. Of the three, "Ghosts of Conscience," "Again,



Scenario Book.

Troublesome Tribbles," and "In the Presence of Mine Enemies," the second is undoubtedly the most fun and the one that I recommend starting players out on. It is especially appropriate if the players portray the *Enterprise* crew as there are references of special meaningfulness to the series regulars (this is true of "Ghost" as well). It'll give players the best chance to learn the system while offering fewer chances for them to get in serious trouble (though this *can* happen). The first and third scenarios are apparently designed to allow characters to wander through the ship plans provided with the set. While "Presence" may also be played with series characters, it is recommended that players use their own characters, as it is an advanced scenario, and most *Trek* fans would probably suffer less trauma on losing a self-created character than on being responsible for the death of Spock or Scotty.

Conclusion

I like this game. And I think you will, too, despite any picky points you can find that don't quite agree with your own concept of how a *Star Trek* game should be (does it *really* matter that there are no rules for wide-beam phaser stun?). It has its flaws, as does any system and it wasn't possible to cover every aspect of *Star Trek* in one game. But everything you *really* need for a satisfying *Star Trek* role-playing system is to be found here — in fact, just about everything you need for *any* SFRPG. So I recommend you not be put off by the high price of this package. Incidentally, FASA will release the rulebook, for \$10, as a stand-alone item. Give *Star Trek — The Role-Playing Game* a try. I think you'll be glad you entered the Final Frontier. This game, so far, is my pick for the best role-playing system of 1983. (Mission completed. Beam me aboard, Scotty . . .)

Star Trek — The Role-Playing Game is designed by Guy W. McLimore, Jr., Greg K. Poehlein and David F. Tepool (Fantasimulations Associates) and is published by FASA Corporation. It retails for \$25.00 and includes a 128-page 8½" x 11" two-color rulebook, a 48-page 8½" x 11" adventure book, an 80 page 8½" x 33" starship combat hex grid, 112 die-cut counters, and two 20-sided dice.