

# PUTTING MORE PUNCH INTO STARSHIP COMBAT

by  
Stewart Robertson

We have all seen and read of the adventures of Captain Kirk and the crew of the *Enterprise* as they protect the United Federation of Planets. The UFP has often come into conflict with starships of alien races: the Romulans and gorns, for instance. But the one foe which has threatened our heroes most of all are the Klingons. These warrior-bred aliens have proven themselves to be near-equals of the Federation in combat. Vessels of Starfleet are more technologically advanced, but Klingon ships are faster and their crews more bloodthirsty. The outcome of a battle between ships of these two races is decided more by the skill and cunning of the ship commanders than by mere firepower.

However, players of FASA's *Star Trek Starship Combat Simulator* will find this imagery lacking. Instead of tactical maneuvering, two opposing ships usually just sit on the hex map and shoot at each other. Rather than combat being decided by superior strategy, the winner is the one with the most weapons. This makes the outcome of starship combat tragically predictable. Between Federation and Klingon ships of the same class, it is invariably the Klingon who loses.

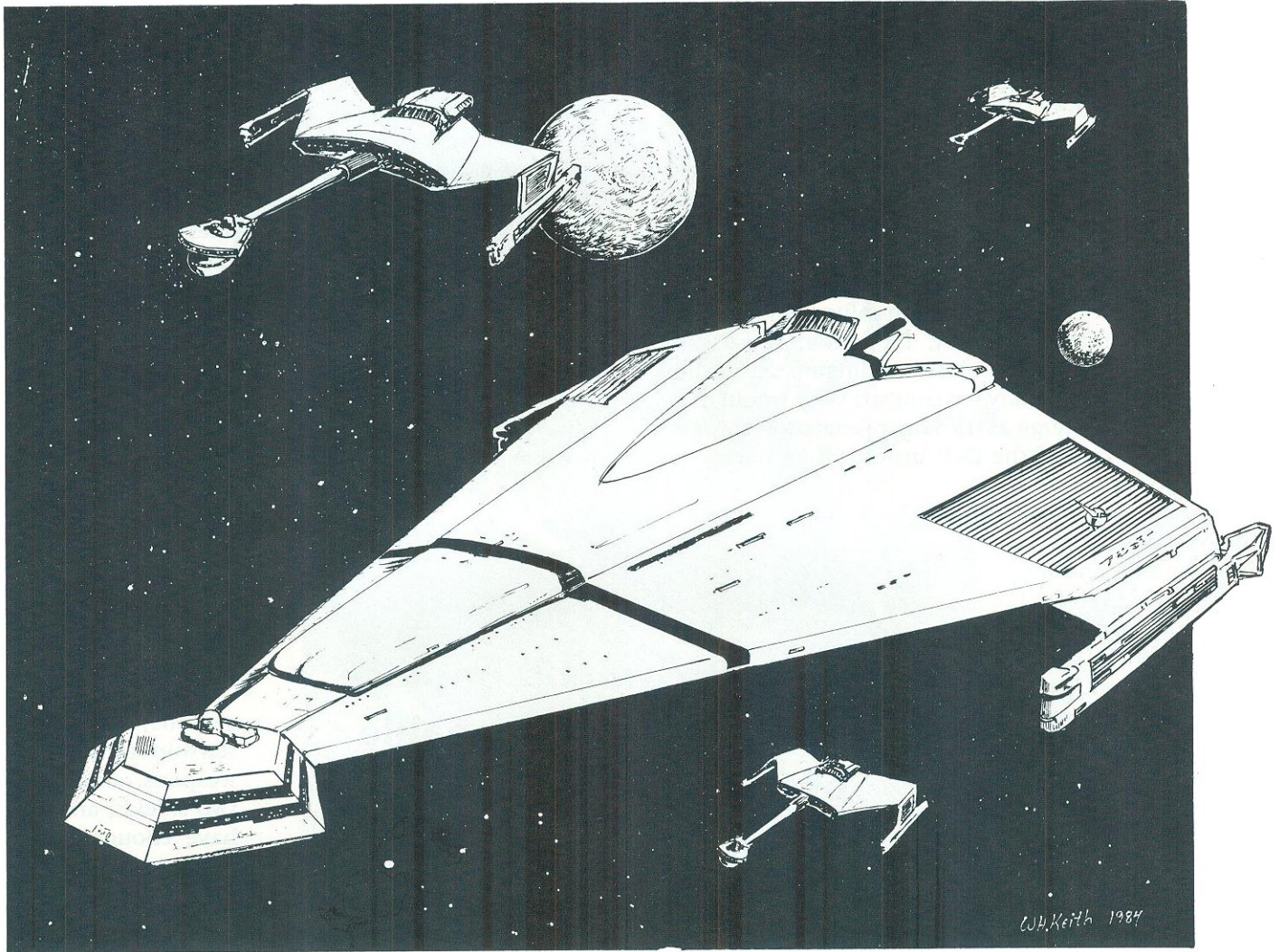
The causes for these problems are threefold. First, large amounts of energy are needed to operate the various systems in a starship. For example, a *Constitution* class starship, as shown in the original TV show, can produce 44 points of energy each turn. It takes 32 points to charge all of the ship's weapons. Raising only one of the ship's six deflector shields to full power takes eight more. The remaining four give the ship enough power to move only one hex. The Klingon ship isn't much better off. Charg-

ing all the disrupter banks on a D-7A Type Cruiser requires 24 energy points, while raising one shield to full power costs eight more. Since the D-7A produces only 40 points of energy per turn, we are left with just enough power to move two hexes.

This leads us to the second problem: the rules of maneuvering. We have seen innumerable times when tactical movement becomes very important in starship combat. In both TV episodes and movies, starships were shown as being in a tactically weaker position because damage to warp drive engines had stripped them of their ability to maneuver. This is rarely true in the *Starship Combat Game*. Because of the high cost of movement and the rules for structural damage, speed is actually a disadvantage in the game. With a cost of four energy points per hex of movement, any maneuvering to find a better shot will deplete a starship of its available power for shields and weapons. Because of this deficiency of energy, the best tactic in the game is to sit in one spot with the ship's forward shield on full and just shoot at the enemy.

The third problem is the balance of firepower between starships of the Federation and the Klingons. Comparing game statistics for the *Constitution* Class Cruiser and the Klingon d-7A, we find that the Federation ship can fire six phasers and two photon torpedoes, which can do a total of 68 points of damage. The Klingon's four disrupter banks can do only a total of 32 points, less than half of its enemy. The Klingons are even more overmatched when defensive systems are considered. Both ships require eight points of power to charge one of their deflector screens to full, but this gives the *Constitution* Class vessel





16 shield points of protection while the D-7A only gets eight. That's half the protection for the same cost.

In order to bring the excitement of "Star Trek" to starship combat, and to allow the Klingons to compete against their Federation adversaries the rules for handling starships need overhauling. By increasing the ship's ability to maneuver, combat will become a real test of skill instead of a test of who has the most weapons. And only by making the Klingon ships more game-balanced can they hope to be the threat they're intended to be. These suggestions use the *Constitution* Class and D-7A for reference, but they should apply for any type of ship in the game.

Since the main problem of the game is the enormous energy cost to run a starship, we should look into decreasing the power needed for the different systems. First, let's look at the deflector shields. All starships have six shields. Each shield protects one hexside, or 1/6th of the ship. They can be charged with up to eight points of energy each. Thus, to fully protect a ship on all sides requires 48 points of energy, more than most starships can produce.

These costs for ship protection are much too high. A ship which raises more than one shield would seriously cut down its energy available for other systems. Double

the efficiency of the deflector shield generators to correct this problem. If we cut the energy cost for shields in half, we effectively give each ship more energy to use. A *Constitution* Class starship would still have a maximum shield strength of 16, but now it would only cost four energy points to raise one shield to full strength. Every energy point used creates four points of deflector shielding. These shield points can be used on one ship's facing or divided between several shields. To raise all shields would cost 24 points.

Federation ships, however, still have too much of an advantage against the Klingons. Halving the costs of deflectors gives Klingon ships two points of shielding per energy point. Comparing this to Starfleet ships, the Klingons still have only half the total defensive strength of their opponents. More work is needed to make these ships play-balanced.

Instead of doubling the efficiency of Klingon deflectors, triple it. For each point of energy a D-7A puts into its screens, it gets three points worth of shielding. Each shield can be charged to four points of energy for a maximum shield strength of 12 points. This brings the defensive system of the Klingons up to 3/4ths of the *Enterprise*.



Now we can turn our attention to the movement rules. It baffles me why warp drive and impulse engines are barely capable of moving the ships that they are in. Both the *Constitution* and D-7A Classes require four points of energy to move one hex. This is extremely expensive, especially when you consider that all energy is produced in the engines to begin with. Instead, let movement cost only one energy point for each point of movement. This is far more realistic and will allow for tactical movement for each ship at a more reasonable energy cost.

It seems to me that some Klingon ships would have an advantage in maneuverability. Federation vessels are large, multi-purpose ships, while the Klingons use smaller ships designed specifically for combat. Why would they require as much energy as the larger Federation ships to move? In the case of the D-7, instead of an energy to movement ratio of one to one, give the Klingon ship a ratio of one to one and a quarter (four to five). The number of movement points are rounded down. In other words, one, two, or three energy points would be needed for one, two or three movement points, but four points of energy would give the Klingon ship a speed of four or five. This gives the lighter vessel

higher speeds and greater maneuverability than Starfleet vessels. Table One shows the cost of movement for the Federation and Klingon ships listed in the game. Cross-referencing the type of ship with the desired amount of movement will give the energy required.

Finally, let's look at the game balance between Federation and Klingon ships. Increasing the maximum shield strength to 12 points on the D-7A helps offset the excessive advantages of the Starfleet ships. However, the *Enterprise* still has twice the firepower of its usual adversaries.

To remedy this situation, we must look at the different types of weapons used by either side. Disrupters are larger and bulkier than phasers. They require more energy to fire, but do the same amount of damage. The disrupters are even more unbalanced when compared to photon torpedoes, which do ten points of damage for one point of energy. And the D-7A has half the number of weapons as the *Constitution* Class has.

To make the firepower of the D-7 more balanced, double the effect of the disrupters. Do this by arming and

firing them as indicated in the original rules. However, roll the damage location for each disrupter hit twice, and apply the full amount of energy charged into the weapon to each location. A fully charged KD-6 disrupter (six points of energy) will damage two areas of the target for six points each, for a total of 12 points. A D-7A Class Cruiser will then be able to do 48 points worth of damage. The +2 damage bonus listed in the rules is ignored, while the maximum range remains 18 hexes.

An optional rule would be to add modifiers for firing at ships moving at high speed. The weapons on these ships are aimed by sophisticated computers, but the targets they are firing at are controlled with equally advanced computers and move at speeds faster than light. Therefore, when firing at a moving starship, reference the speed of the target vessel on Table Two and apply

the listed modifiers to the die roll to hit. The movement of the firing ship does not effect the roll since the computer automatically compensates.

With these modifications, a typical starship can fire all its weapons, raise at least two shields, and still have enough power for tactical maneuvering. The Klingon Empire's D-7A cruisers now have their deflector screen

strength increased and contain weapons which are a better match for their opponents.

These rule variations of decreasing shield and movement costs and doubling the effect of disrupters can be used for other starship classes in the game. Some of these ships may require a little extra attention to aid game balance. For example, the total engine output for the Klingon D-7M Class Cruiser should be increased to 56 points (25 from each warp engine and 6 from the impulse engine) to make it a match for the newer *Enterprise* Class ship.

Using these rule variations, starships in the *Starship Combat Simulator* will be able to move around the hexmap. Battle tactics and game strategy will become important with this freedom of movement. Combat will no longer be decided solely upon which ship has more weapons. Most importantly, the play balance between Klingon and Federation ships will be increased. Now the age-old enemies of the Federation are no longer a joke but a serious threat for gamers to enjoy playing or fighting in their own game.

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