



S C R E E N T E S T

Genre Adventure/Arcade Blast

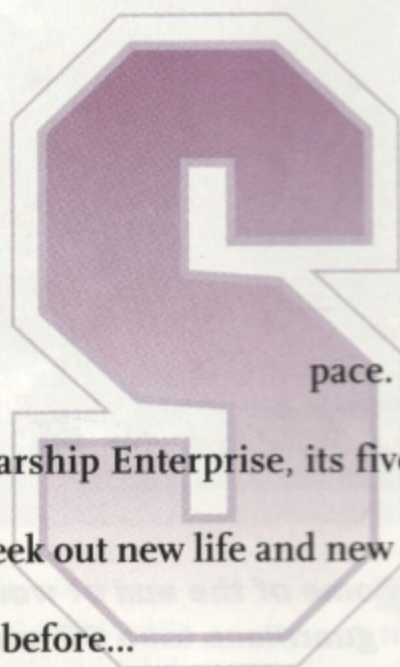
Publisher Electronic Arts

Developer Interplay

Price £34.99

# STAR TREK

## The 25th Anniversary



pace. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise, its five-year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations. To boldly go where no man has gone before...

It's been exactly 25 years since the USS Enterprise first left space dock in search of those new worlds and life-forms, and though Kirk, Spock, Bones, Scotty and the rest of the crew may get fatter and more in need of nylon hair furnishings with each successive adventure, the perennial success of Gene Roddenberry's sci-fi masterpiece proves that you can't keep a good idea down. After all, few SF sagas are so prolific they can claim to be a genre all of their own. Since Star Trek's inception there have been 70-odd episodes, a cartoon series, a so-so spin-off series (The Next Generation, now in its umpteenth season) and, as of this month, six blockbusting feature films.

Though younger fans will know Star Trek only from the movies, true Trekkies know that the real magic is to be found in the original TV series. Okay, so the Enterprise did look a bit like a die-cast model back then, and maybe the costumes, sets and special effects were all highly dodgy, but that's part of what made it so much FUN! Kirk's constantly-quizzical expression and flings with green alien women, the never-ending verbal spar-



Travel through space can be a hazardous process for those captains not fully versed in the ways of the space-lanes. Here, Kirk is doing just fine, but jaunting off just for fun can lead to all an unpleasant bout of the Klingons.

ring between Spock and McCoy, Uhura's impossibly-short skirts, Scotty screaming "The engines cannae take nae more, Cap'n!"... it's arguable that the show's ever-prevailing camp atmosphere is what lifted it out of the ordinary and into the annals of true greatness.

It's suitable, then, that the game that's been released to celebrate Star Trek's official quarter-century birthday should be based not on the more serious, sophisticated movies, but those original cheap'n'cheerful TV episodes. This choice of subject matter comes as no surprise. What is surprising is the incredible authenticity with which producers Interplay have managed to capture the show's look, feel and message.

Being careful not to make the same mistakes made by previous Star Trek games (Firebird's effort being a particularly painful memory), Interplay has worked hard to present Star Trek as authentically as possible within a playable game structure. The result is one that, on paper, doesn't sound too inspiring, but on screen works brilliantly. Primarily, it's an icon-driven graphic adventure presented in the same style as a Lucasfilm or Sierra product, but with a liberal sprinkling of 3D space-combat arcade action in the Wing Commander vein. Granted, it sounds very chalk-and-cheesish, but it works a whole lot better than you're thinking.

The game is presented not as one single entity or storyline, but as a collection of small, independent storylines in the form of TV episodes. It's probably the game's single most inventive aspect, both in terms of gameplay (it's never been done before) and as a device for emulating the feel of the show. What you're getting here is effectively a whole season of Star Trek, with each storyline based vaguely on real episodes. It's a lot like the series in the sense that, though the plots change, the format remains much the same from episode to episode. An initial flypast of the Enterprise accompanies the episode title, and then it's onto the bridge for either a reading from the Captain's log or a message from Starfleet Command to set up the story. In true Star Trek fashion, very little is known about a mission initially (you're normally ordered to visit a certain planet just to investigate strange goings-on or



something equally vague), and what's really happening only becomes apparent as the plot unfolds.

Apart from in combat, Kirk's control of the Enterprise is limited. Everything is operated semi-automatically from the bridge, via the various crew members. Mr Sulu handles shield control and planet orbiting, Chekov looks after weapons and warp engines, Uhura does communications and first officer Spock is an all-round helpful bloke,

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offering scientific background and sound advice. Though everyone is seated as they should be, die-hard Trekkies may be a little miffed to see that Scotty now sits on the bridge as well. Authenticity dictates that he should be getting his hands dirty in the engine room somewhere, but in order to contain everything within the bridge, he handles damage control from a computer console to Kirk's left.

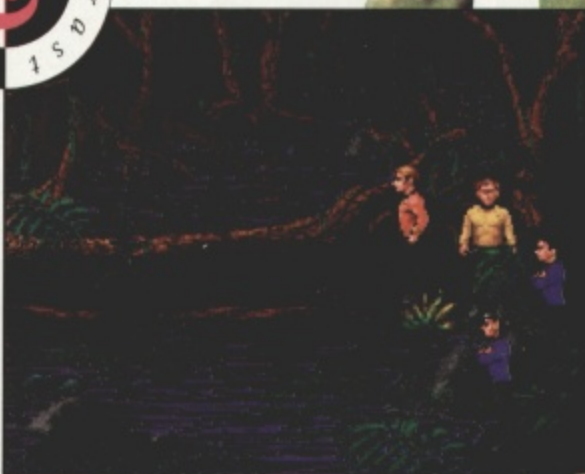
Having an experienced bridge crew means that the player, as Kirk, has very little to do in peacetime besides make basic decisions. Just click on a planet via Chekov and the warp engines do the rest. Chances are, however, that when the Enterprise arrives at its destination, the situation

will hot up. The Klingons, Romulans and Elasi pirates all do their bit as the bad guys from mission to mission, and when an enemy ship is confronted there may be no choice but to engage in combat. You know what these Klingons are like - open fire first, talk later.

Knowing the routine is the key to success in stellar combat. Shields are the first order of the day (any hit on the Enterprise is crippling without them), and once Chekov fires up the weapons you're ready to rock and roll. Combat takes place via the giant viewscreen at the front of the bridge, with the Enterprise steered and weapons aimed by a set of miniature crosshairs. The mouse buttons give access to phasers (energy-consuming but fast and accurate) and photon torpedoes (efficient and powerful but slow and tricky to aim), which are fired as the target(s) streak past. Generally, enemy ships move quickly and keep their distance, so the trick is to fire well ahead of them in the direction they're moving. Estimating distance and speed so that your shot and its target will end up in the same place at the same time is tricky, but very satisfying when it works.

There's very little strategy or tactical element to Star Trek's combat - it's basically a question of knocking out the enemy before his shots can cause too much damage to the Enterprise. The shields provide an adequate buffer, absorbing the first dozen or so hits, but if you can't get a quick kill, further enemy shots will damage the ship's sys- ▶ 64

It's was a very close-run thing, but **Monkey Island 2** narrowly holds on to its ACE Adventure Benchmark. In my mind at least, Star Trek is by far the more innovative product with its individual episodes and multi-character control, and the awesome presentation means it pips Lucasfilm's effort in the atmosphere stakes too. In the puzzle stakes, the individual posers are of about the same quality, although Star Trek's episodic format means the puzzles have to be self-contained and are somewhat less elaborate as a result. Unfortunately, the rather short number of missions is a serious consideration, and the end result is that **Monkey Island 2** is likely to offer the serious adventurer a lot more enjoyment in the long term.







Chekov is a navigation and weapons man. The Enterprise travels by means of the player selecting a planet from his galactic map. It's also his job to arm phasers and torpedoes prior to combat.



Mister Sulu has the important job of controlling deflector shields, and is also responsible for putting the Enterprise in orbit around planets - transporters only work when in orbit due to their limited range.

## THE BRIDGE

This is where it all happens. From here the player issues commands to his crew (via Captain Kirk, of course) and partakes in combat with other vessels. Apart from the main sensor screen, a wealth of information is available - power and speed readings appear above the main screen, while damage displays are situated to the far left and right. Perhaps the most important instrument is the radar, used for locating enemy ships not in visual range.



By selecting Kirk, the player can review the Captain's Log (showing reports on previous missions), beam down to planets and other ships and perhaps most importantly - save the game at any time.



Scotty's job is to control damage to the Enterprise during combat. He automatically repairs systems as they are hit, although the player can select specific areas for priority repair. There's also an emergency power reserve for use in times of crisis.



Although he has no specific task, Spock can give Kirk expert advice on a particular subject or situation at all times. His logical insight can be invaluable. The player can also access Spock's computer directly, for raw data on a chosen topic.



Uhura handles communication to and from the Enterprise - all incoming messages go through her. She can hail ships and planets, as well as transmit messages and other data.

**S**tar Trek's combination of diverse arcade and adventure segments requires the player to develop a wide variety of skills, from marksmanship to lateral thinking. Members of the crew are always on hand to help out, but in the end it's up to Kirk to get results - whoever said commanding a starship was easy?



## TO BOLDLY GO...

Once the landing party has beamed down from the ship, the real fun begins. There's no end to the scrapes that Kirk and his team can get into - here's a choice selection...

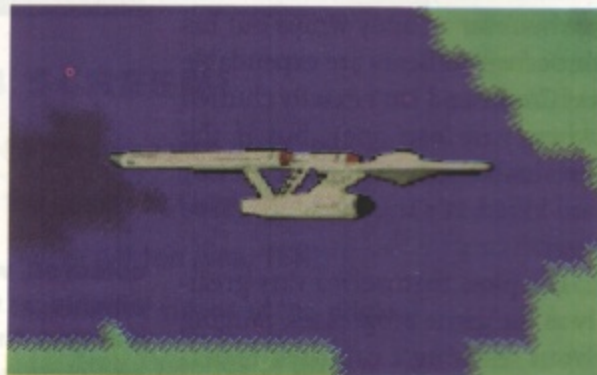


(Above) If it's a purer arcade experience the player seeks, the sensor screen can be blown up to fill the entire screen. It looks nicer, but none of the bridge facilities, like damage control and radar, are available, making things a whole lot tougher.

(Top Right) The Galactic Map acts as the game's copy protection - the manual is required to find out which planet is which, and if the player fumbles and comes out of warp speed in the wrong system, he faces death at the hands of an irate enemy.

(Bottom Right) The player is treated to a pretty set-piece animation whenever the Enterprise is put into orbit.

(Below) Orders from Star Fleet always come from one of the Admirals, who provides the vaguest description of the mission before disappearing and leaving Kirk to work the rest out for himself. He also pops up at the end of a successful mission to award commendation points based on how well you did - these points are translated into crew experience which helps to make the Enterprise's systems more effective in combat.



In *The Feathered Serpent*, Kirk must stand trial by a Klingon court for attempting to protect a harmless fugitive by the name of Quetzecoatl. With such a vicious system of justice, can Kirk survive?



In *Love's Labor Jeopardized*, a deadly virus has broken out inside an orbiting space laboratory. Worse still, the Romulans have decided to lay siege to the station at the same time! Guess whose job it is to sort out the mess by finding an antidote...?



Just one of the problems faced by Kirk in *That Old Devil Moon*. An ancient alien civilisation has been discovered on this desert planet - but how on Earth do you get through this giant door?



The thrills of *The Feathered Serpent* escalate when Kirk and his team are challenged to complete this Klingon battle of wits. The door isn't locked, but how do you get past the deadly forcefield?



In many situations, Doctor McCoy's medical kit is not enough, especially when trying to treat aliens like these dying Romulans. In these cases, Bones must manufacture special medicines - but how?





(Above) Kirk comes face-to-face with a band of ruthless Elasi terrorists on the bridge of a stolen Federation ship in *Kidnapped*. Will it be a phaser fight, or can Jim bring things to an amicable conclusion? It's up to you...

61► tems. Scotty carries out the repair work as quickly as he can, but in the later combats even his experienced hands may not be able to keep up with the continued pounding.

With the combat over (if indeed there's any to start with), and the relevant cursory stuff completed (Kirk should always have a chat with Spock and get Uhura to attempt radio contact), the next step is to beam down to the rendezvous point - be it a planet, ship, space station or whatever - which triggers the start of the game's predominant adventure element. A trip to the transporter room is a necessity on every mission, with the landing party or "away team" always comprised of Kirk, Spock, Doctor McCoy and the ubiquitous red-uniformed security officer.

Having beamed down from the Enterprise, Kirk and his team are free to explore the landscape in standard point-and-click fashion. The size of each episode's environment varies, but generally it's a very self-contained affair, with a high volume of puzzles, posers and interactive characters that make up a whole story within as few as half a dozen locations. The player only controls Kirk directly (the rest of the team follow him automatically from location to location), with all the standard adventure options - Talk, Get, Look and Use - available from a simple graphic menu. The majority of the puzzles are based on collecting objects and putting them to good use elsewhere, although it's the party's permanent inventory of standard equipment that continually proves the most useful. Spock's tricorder, for instance, works

like a very powerful version of Look, scanning an area or object and revealing information that the eye would never see. In turn, McCoy has a medical kit and a tricorder of his own for analysing the wounded or dead (he actually says "He's dead, Jim" when he scans a corpse - it's great), while Kirk has his communicator for contacting the orbiting Enterprise and everyone has a phaser which can, of course, be set to kill or stun.

Given the Federation's prime directive of non-interference and no unnecessary violence, the phasers are hardly ever used (psychopaths go home - the game won't let you shoot at anything you don't have to), and TALKing is the favoured alternative whenever a new character is encountered. As superior officer, Kirk always does the talking, and conversations work in the same way as *Monkey Island* with the player choosing from a list of responses at pertinent intervals in the dialogue.

Despite the fact that Kirk does a lot of the leg-work himself, it's by no means his show, and none of the missions could be completed without the expertise of Bones and Spock close at hand. Whenever it comes to operating a complex piece of machinery, programming a computer or doing anything vaguely technical, Spock's the only man who can handle it. McCoy, on the other hand, has medical talents that range from curing the sick and injured to manufacturing special medicines and identifying dangerous bacteria in the air. As for the security officer - well, every Trekkie knows that his only job is to be the first one to get shot whenever a baddy whips out his phaser. As such, security officers are expendable (though *Starfleet Command* isn't exactly chuffed when you lose one), but if the invaluable Kirk, Spock or McCoy are killed, it's immediately game over.

The plots themselves vary greatly as the game progresses, ranging from rescuing a captured Federation vessel from the hands of Elasi terrorists to freeing an orbiting medical centre that's under attack from the Romulans, being tried by the vicious Klingon legal system, deactivating a deadly computer system that's woken up after centuries of dormancy and even foiling the

plans of that favourite Star Trek baddy, Harry Mudd. It's this episodic formula that does wonders for Star Trek's playability and atmosphere. With an intro and epilogue for each one, they really do feel like TV episodes, and unlike conventional adventures, there's very little chance of getting bored prior to completion as the player's interest is revitalised at the start of each new "show". The combined teams of ACE and sister mag CU Amiga, who were cramming into the games room every time a mission was completed to see what the next one held are living testament to that fact.

The adventures themselves are small but perfectly formed. Though none of the missions are



## PC Version

Superb soundcard music and effects make *Star Trek* a sonic treat, and the visuals are superb throughout - brightly-

coloured, well-defined and instantly recognisable as from the TV show. A word of warning, though - you really do need a big and chunky PC to get the most out of the game. The game will run without VGA or a sound card, but they're both mandatory if you want to really get into the swing of things. It takes an age to install, and the hard disk is accessed constantly during play, making a fast machine a necessity.

## Amiga Version

The fate of *Star Trek* on the Amiga is still undecided at time of writing. The game's just so technically demanding that it may be too much for the machine to handle feasibly. There's talk that it may appear in some sort of CD-driven incarnation... more news as and when.

## ST Version

Sorry ST-fans, but you definitely will not be going where no man has gone before. Electronic Arts have no plans for an Atari version.

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## PUT IT ON SCREEN!

Yes indeed! Scotty may not be able to "give ye annae more, Cap'n", but we certainly can. Thanks to our top chums at Electronic Arts,



we've got ten (yes, TEN!) superlative videos of the original Star Trek TV series to give away. If you're not already a Trekkie, here's your chance to become one with a stonking set

of vids to get your collection off to a whanging good start. There's over 20 top-class episodes to get your teeth into here, and to be their proud owner, all you have to do is answer three simple questions:



1. What is the USS Enterprise's registration number?
2. In what century is Star Trek set?
3. How do you spell Klingon?

Easy, eh? Just bung your

answers on a postcard, and send them to Star Trekkin', ACE Magazine, Priory Court, 30-32 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU. The closing date is 8th April, so get a move on!



A fine example of Star Trek's superb graphical authenticity. This sick bay is accurate right down to the little coloured sliders (which are supposed to indicate life-signs) that move up and down in no particular sequence.

really that long, each one has bags of head-scratching potential, and the idea of having a party of four on-screen characters working together to solve the puzzles rather than a solitary figure works wonders both for the game and for the televisual atmosphere. In fact it's Star Trek's remarkable authenticity that is by far its most impressive aspect. Interplay's designers have no doubt broken their backs researching every minute detail of Star Trek's look, sound, dialogue, characters and little touches, and the result is nigh-on perfection. I challenge even the most devout Trekkie to find the slightest inaccuracy or omission. Everything is spot-on, from the title track and incidental music to the teleportation effects, McCoy/Spock arguments and even the way Kirk sits in his bridge chair. I can safely say that I've never seen a licenced game that does such justice to its subject matter. Interplay's game isn't just based on Star Trek. It IS Star Trek, and I'm having a very hard time getting over just how authentic, atmospheric and enchanting it really is.

Normally, adventures leave me cold. I don't have anything like the patience and logical insight required to play them, but Star Trek's user-friendliness and terrific atmosphere had me - and the rest of the office - under its spell from the moment the first few bars of the opening music made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. The combat aspect may not be to everyone's taste, but it doesn't intrude too much, and what's left can safely be described as a joy to behold. Anybody who ever enjoyed the TV show should buy this immediately, as should any adventurer with a modicum of self respect. Me? I'm still reeling with the shock.

● Gary Whitta

## R A T I N G S



Awesome televisual authenticity. Superb Presentation. Looks lovely, sounds lovely too.



Maybe too easy for adventure hardnuts. Arcade side is a bit of a let-down.

## 940 P C R A T I N G

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With the episodic presentation, Star Trek does a fine job of holding the players interests by doing it in short bursts rather than trying to string things out over one long story. Because the puzzles are often very difficult, and occasionally a bit illogical (ironic, eh?), it can be easy to get stuck, and it's here that the episode idea sometimes backfires. Each mission is set within just a few screens, and you can't go onto the next without completing the current one. So if you get seriously stuck, you've got no chance of exploring elsewhere and seeing any more of the game. It can be a touch irritating. The space combat stuff may also pose a problem for serious adventurers who aren't hot on the arcade side, but more well-rounded gamers should have no trouble. The only real problem is the overall longevity, as defined by the number of missions - with only eight of them, seasoned adventurers may find the challenge distressingly short-lived. Those new to the genre, however, would be hard-pushed to find a friendlier, more enjoyable and absorbing experience.

### PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE

