

close up

STAR TREK VIDEOGAMES

The final frontier at your fingertips.

by Tim Moriarty

Starfleet Command and a few die-hard Trekkies may not approve, but space-game fanatics will surely be pleased: two videogames based on *Star Trek* are currently in release, and the object of both is to blast Klingon warships to metal confetti.

Sega, perhaps mindful that *Star Trek* fans like to think of themselves and the show as non-violent, have called their game *The Strategic Operations Simulator*. Its purpose is to train Starfleet Cadets in Federation combat tactics. The game, for one or two players, is already in many arcades across the country.

The game begins with a display of Klingon ships, Starbases, and the *Enterprise*. The player maneuvers the *Enterprise* with the rotary helm control and the thrust button. There is also a warp drive button.

The player's shields, warp drive, energy and photon torpedoes are always in limited supply. Phaser power is in unlimited supply, but phasers can only destroy one Klingon ship at a time while photon torpedoes can destroy several vessels with one salvo. The number of shields available is displayed on the screen. If all shields are depleted, the player must warp to a starbase to have them replenished or risk losing the *Enterprise* to Klingon fire power.

In the first phase of the simulation, the player does battle with a fleet of Klingon battlecruisers and anti-matter saucers. These saucers can attach themselves to the hull and drain off all the *Enterprise's* warp drive energy. If that happens, the player may be stranded, out of reach of a starbase and left to fight off the Klingons at a severe disadvantage.

The second phase of the exercise is



called the Nomad round. The Nomad, a computer-robot complex, is depositing mines. The player must seek out and destroy Nomad while avoiding the space mines.

There are forty simulation levels in all, each level faster and more complicated than the preceding one.

According to a Sega spokesman, their first *Star Trek* home videogame cartridge will be available in the spring. Though it is titled *The Wrath of Khan*, it is said to be an adaptation of the arcade *Strategic Operations Simulator*.

A second home video cartridge is slated for the end of the year to coincide with the release of the third *Star Trek* movie. Both the movie and the game will probably shed the tongue-in-cheek title *In Search Of Spock* by that time.

The Vectrex Home Arcade system has the only other *Star Trek* game currently available. Titled *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, the game has nothing to do with the subject matter of the film.

The Vectrex game provides a Kirk's-eye-view out the bridge viewer screen. The object of the game is to fight

through a swarming fleet of Klingon and Romulan ships to get to the Klingon Mothership, which must then be destroyed.

The player must clear eight sectors of the enemy before coming to the ninth and final sector where the Mothership resides. There is an alternative, however: at the beginning of the game, the player places a black hole in any sector (s)he chooses. The player can jump the black hole and arrive immediately at the ninth sector, and the Mothership challenge.

In order to destroy the Mothership, the player must fight off the ship's defenses while waiting for the exact moment to strike: the ship is only vulnerable when her nose is lit up. Also, the ship can only be destroyed by hitting it straight on.

The player is given the opportunity to refuel once in each sector, but even refueling presents a challenge: the space station spins quite rapidly, and the docking procedure must be precise.

The four Vectrex buttons control the *Enterprise's* movement, her firing mechanisms, her shields, and either the docking maneuver or the jump through the black hole.

Vectrex has no plans to release any further *Star Trek* titles. Their license extended only to the title *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

Some time last year, Paramount, Sega's parent company, tried to rescind Vectrex's license to produce their *ST:TMP* game, but failed. According to Hope Neiman of Vectrex, Paramount "wanted their license back when they realized that *Wrath of Khan* was going to be a hit." A source in the Paramount legal department denied Vectrex's interpretation of their motives.