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Maurice Molyneaux's Design Work On...

*Title:* Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, **Crossroads of Time**
Credit: **Designer (lead)**
Developer: **Novotrade**
Published: **Fall 1995 by Playmates Interactive Entertainment**
Platforms: **Genesis & Super Nintendo***

Duties on this product were wide-ranging, encompassing research, conceptual work, meetings with programming staff and publisher, numerous design tasks, and hands-on involvement with shaping the product itself. I also acted as a "continuity cop" to assure that all the requirements of the game design and mandates of the licensor were correctly implemented.
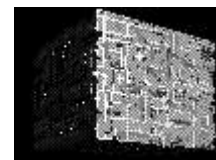
Concurrently, I wrote the game story, scripted all dialogue (including some in [klingonese](#)), storyboarded and art directed all of the linking animations between game stages, checked for graphic continuity with the TV series and suggested changes, provided the developers with blueprints and diagrams of needed props and objects, and on several occasions drew new graphical elements when immediate on-the-spot fixes were required. I also researched and provided passcodes (again in klingonese) and contributed texts for use in the game manual.

* The Super Nintendo version was a "port" of the Genesis version, and a very poor port at that! My apologies to anyone who played it!

Personal Reflections

Working on a licened property like *Star Trek* can be a pain in the @&$. Here are examples of why:

- You're forced to write the game proposal over six weeks before the pilot episode airs! **--and all I had to work from was a draft of the show bible, which described the setting and characters, and, a little later, the first six shooting scripts and a pile of on-set photos. Not much to base a game propsal on!**
- Paramount's licensing and legal department sends you "corrections" that are often incorrect. **I distinctly remember being told that I could not use a phaser as an explosive device. I wrote back and named six Star Trek episodes where that very thing had occurred.**
- Your developers are foreigners who don't understand the licenese. **This game was developed by what was then Novotrade, in Budapest, Hungary...a very talented group of developers, but they never quite "got" Star Trek and therefore there was a constant problem with their coming up with solutions that violated the license.**
- Paramount signs-off on your design. Four weeks later, they un-approve it. **September: "Your design is approved as is." October: "You can't use the Borg and you can't start the game on the Saratoga." Your game has been in production for almost two years. You fight. You get to keep the Borg, but the Saratoga goes from being the action packed introductory stage to a flashback near the end, and the whole game balance goes down a wormhole.**

The biggest design challenge in this product was how to make an action game that didn't rely on violence. This was back in the days before Star Trek featured a weekly phaser battle.

My solution was to concentrate on rewarding the player for humanitarian behavior, where constructive acts were more rewarding than the destructive variety. This was exemplified in the first game level designed, the starship <u>Saratoga</u>, in which the player would have to rescue numerous crewmembers in order to solve the puzzle and escape. The only opponents in the stage were a few scattered Borg drones, which became impervious to your weapons after a shot or two, thus forcing the player to use viloence in a very selective and discriminating fashion.

Various circumstances forced me to leave the project after 4 months, but 11 months later I was approached by the (then) new producer at Playmates Interactive and asked to come back onto the project. Unfortunately, a lot of the work that had been done in the intervening months had wandered away from the structure I established, with the result that far too much of the game happened off the station in environments that were not really related to the show, and the developers had worked a bunch of extra play mechanics into the game which made it far too difficult to play. Unfortunately, so much work had been done that it was impossible to get back to what the game should have been.

When the finished game was reviewed virtually every review singled out the <u>Saratoga</u> stage as the best level of the game, a source of immense pride to me as it's the only part of the game that reflects my original intentions.

The Cutting Room Floor

A lot of stuff got cut out of this game due to size limitations (the cartridge was to be only 8-megabits/1-megabyte in size).

- **The Captive Pursuit Stage.**

  The big central action bit in original spec. Chief O'Brien would help an alien called "Tosk" escape the pursuing "Hunters". As O'Brien, the player would have to figure out a safe path to docking port, manipulating various devices on the way. The game-controlled Tosk would follow, fight pursuing Hunters when they appeared, buying time for the player. All that remains of this is a test section in a prototype cartridge ROM I have, and a [script of the Promenade interaction](#) that was to precede it.
- **The ability to play Dax or Kira.**
  Most of the male figures in the game shared the same graphic set, which had been carefully designed so that changing the color palette would result in different uniforms (Starfleet, Bajoran, etc.). Unfortunately, the developers overtaxed the graphics resources and didn't have enough left to include the full range of running and jumping animations for the female characters. I asked that other things be dropped to accomodate this, but it never happened. In order to make at least one female character playable, I made it Kira who pilots the Runabout through the Wormhole and Asteroid Belt stages, so the player at least nominally controls one of the women.
- **The ability to crawl.**
  Lost for the same reason as losing the animations of the female characters. I was sorely disappointed by this, because I really wanted the characters to be able to move like real human beings: run, jump, walk, climb, crawl. We lost that cool moment where you can't see a way out until you notice the little air duct, throw Sisko on his belly and crawl through. Ah-ha!
- **The warp core jettison and the entire 2nd half of the Saratoga.**
  The best level of the game was originally twice as big as it ended up, and would have

been played in two parts. One of the best features of the second half was the way you would buy more time...jettisoning the ship's damamged warp core! A version of this second section of the Saratoga was built, but it was radically changed from my design. Some things had to go for memeory reasons, and this entire stage was one of them. All that remains are images (and a prototype cartridge I have).

- **The turbolifts.**
  You used to be able to ride these around too...but when the game levels were changed this was a no-brainer to toss out because it didn't add much to the experience and took extra code and graphics.

- **The Wolf 359 Battle.**
  Admittedly, this was never planned for the Genesis or SNES versions of the game, but I'd hoped we'd get the go-ahead to do a Sega-CD version, for which I planned to produce a **huge space battle** where 39 starships get trashed! But, we discovered that a Sega-CD version would have required another license, so the idea was scrapped. Ah well...

Star Trek, Deep Space Nine, DS9, Sega, SNES, Super Nintendo, SNES, Molyneaux