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reating computer games based on an existing, and widely loved, body of fiction is a tricky business. First, you've got to satisfy the people who love the body of work to begin with by creating a faithful translation of the revered works, and second, you've actually got to make a good game. Either criteria is a major undertaking in itself, and happily, Spectrum Holobyte has succeeded at both with "Star Trek The Next Generation: A Final Unity." In fact, A Final Unity is one of the slickest, most in-depth adaptations-of-a-TV show/movie/novel I've ever played and should please Star Trek fans and hard core gamers alike.

#### [The Plot is Afoot](#)

While on a routine patrol mission, the Enterprise intercepts a Garidian ship fleeing from Romulan space across the neutral zone into Federation space (the Garidians seem to be a splinter part of Romulan society.) In hot pursuit of the refugees is a Garidian Warbird with hostile intentions. Offering sanctuary to the refugees, the Enterprise and its crew find themselves thrust into the midst of a struggle that will effect the very foundations of Romulan society. The player, in his/her role as an invisible puppeteer, must guide ship and crew through space combat, diplomacy, and away missions, in search of the Unity Device, an artifact of tremendous power that could either unite the warring Romulan factions or destroy them.

#### [Like Watching TV](#)

As soon as I booted the game up, I knew it was going to be good. Just like the real show, the

game begins with a 'teaser' - that little bit of lead-in material before the credits that gets you hooked - which most gamers would, of course, just call a cut-scene. But what a cut-scene! The Enterprise slowly swims into view against a backdrop of stars as a Picard voice-over explains the situation. Shortly, they encounter the small Garidian ship and soon after the Garidian Warbird decloaks in a moment which is guaranteed to send chills down any Trekkie's spine. Klaxons sound on the Enterprise bridge as the ship goes to full red-alert...and fade to black.

Next come the credits. The full credits, with Patrick Stewart's voice over, Jerry Goldsmith's great theme music, the shot of Saturn's rings, the Enterprise swishing past, everything. You gotta love it. By this point, I was so impressed, I almost didn't care what the rest of the game looked like.

Credits over (and no commercials!), I found myself back on the bridge and in nominal control.

Like the two earlier Star Trek games from InterPlay, A Final Unity relies on an episodic structure that gives it a TV-show flavor. Within that structure, A Final Unity is divided into three separate elements: command and diplomacy, combat, and away missions.

Before getting into descriptions of the elements, a quick note on difficulty levels is in order. Presumably because the game's designers wanted the game to appeal to the broadest possible audience, there are a several different options to make the game harder or easier depending on individual taste. For instance, during combat, you can assign combat and damage control to Worf and Jordy, respectively, or maintain control over either or both sets of variables. Away teams can be automatically optimized to guarantee the best chance of success or left for you to pick and choose crew and tools, During away missions, crews can either proactively offer suggestions or withhold comments until specifically asked.

### Command and Diplomacy

While aboard the ship, you take the role of Captain Picard. This part of the game consists primarily of directed dialog. You can speak with whatever ships happen to be in the neighborhood, ask the crew for their advice on the current situation, contact Starfleet HQ for mission instructions, or speak with whatever 'guests' happen to be waiting in the briefing room. You can also access the Astrogation, Ops, and Tactical Stations, but more on those later. As conversations go, there are a lot of them, and they're long. Depending on the level of interactivity you prefer, this is either a good or a bad thing. On the one hand, they do make for a richer storyline, but if you're a hardcore gamer, you may find them a bit hard to sit through. In addition, the sometimes overwhelming number of conversational vectors make it difficult to distinguish genuinely important information from less important stuff. As a result, I wound up making several command decisions on my first run through that I didn't realize I was making, giving me the feeling that the game was playing itself. For this reason, it's a good idea to save the game before entering any new conversations.

### way Missions

The away missions are the real heart of the game, though there's so much else that it's hard to tell sometimes. These are fairly standard adventure game segments with different areas to explore and search, various characters to speak with (more directed dialog), tons of inventory (much of it extraneous), and fairly standard 'lock and key' type puzzles.

During away missions, you'll control up to four characters chosen from the crew, and to succeed, you have to bring the right combination of personnel and tools. If you don't want to be bothered with choosing these things, there's a difficulty setting that ensures you have the right crew and tools. It seems to me that you should be able to solve the away missions with any combination of personnel, but perhaps with different ways to solve the puzzles depend on whom you've brought.

You interface with your characters and inventory via a Sierra-like icon bar at the bottom of the screen. For the most part, this works well, though it can be a bit clumsy switching between characters.

As with other parts of the game, the amount of information tends to be overwhelming. For instance, any given location will have many extraneous objects to examine which is a fairly standard adventure game practice. Each member of the away team may give you different descriptions of an item based on their expertise, and only certain crew may recognize the value of certain items. So if you're unsure of an item's value, you may have to examine it up to four separate times to be sure of its worth.

In addition, quite a lot of the puzzles are based on the 'technobabble' that's always been one of TNG's biggest weaknesses. I.e., you might require an inverter coupling to fix the flux capacitor on that control panel...but how could you possibly know that in real life? Of course, there are always plenty of clues to solve these puzzles - usually hints from crew members or npcs - but I much prefer puzzles that can be solved through logic and common sense.

### Combat

This whole area falls into the "everything to all people" category. Combat is what happens when diplomacy fails (or if you just feel like shooting at whomever you're talking to). While the combat window looks very cool, the actual combat is pretty lame and very arcade-style. Like other parts of the game, it too suffers from overwhelming amounts of information. You

control the Enterprise, obviously, and can view the battle from any of several angles. Meanwhile, a secondary display shows you the x,y,z coordinates of the combatants. There are also options for weapons, shields, damage control, communications, tactics, etc. Damage control gives you more than you could ever possibly want to know about the status of your ship while sensors tell you almost as much about your opponent. Tactical control lets you choose from dozens of pre-defined combat maneuvers...but I found that the best thing to do was just keep hitting the phaser and torpedo buttons. Thank goodness, you can assign combat and damage control functions to Worf and Jordy. I understand that the designers wanted to give people the COMPLETE Star Trek simulation, but I felt that this was both too much and not enough: too much info, not enough of a simulator. I'd love to see a real Star Trek flight sim but done up right as a separate game.

### [Astrogation and Ops](#)

These two areas present still more information. Astrogation lets you view all of Alpha quadrant in a dynamic 3-dimensional display with options to view star systems by political alignment, by habitable/inhabitable planets, with or without nebulae, and more. You can also zoom in and get more info than you will ever need about individual star systems and planets. All very cool features and extremely well implemented, but mainly this area is used to set course and speed which you can usually have your crew do for you. This is another feature that I would like to see implemented in an actual flight sim.

Ops consists of a database of Federation knowledge. Info about every possible aspect of your ship and crew, info about all known races, including political, biological, and technological, info about star systems and planets...etc., etc., etc. It's like having the Star Trek Omnipedia included with the game, and while some of it may be interesting, once again, it's just far more info than you will ever need to complete this game.

### [A Quality Production](#)

Everything in the entire game was superbly modeled and rendered on high end graphics stations. The result being that the ships and special effects look JUST like the real thing. I was completely in awe of the cut scenes, and actually didn't mind sitting through them, sometimes even for repeated viewing. That's something I can't say about most games, no matter how good. For instance, I didn't even make it through the first viewing of most of Dark Forces' cut scenes.

Also modeled were the characters. I've heard at least one person complain that Spectrum Holobyte should have gotten live footage of the actors instead of modeling them, but my feeling is that the modeled characters fit into the modeled environment far better than live actors ever could. And they have been lovingly modeled so that with the exception of some skin discoloration, they're pretty much dead on. Their lips even move pretty closely in sync with the dialog (kinda like CyberFlix's CyberPuppets) so the illusion is effective.

Audio production values are top notch too. I mean, this is as good as it gets. A deep, rich musical score in the style of the original accompanies every cut scene and certain other portions of the game, and nowhere does it sound tinny or cheap. Shivers actually ran down my spine at certain parts of the game, thanks largely to the excellent music combined with the great special effects.

But what really brings everything to life is the acting. Those of you who played the two InterPlay Trek games may remember how tired and cranky William Shatner sounded throughout both but that is not the case here. The voice-overs of A Final Unity are superb, as full of energy as any I've heard in any computer game. The lead actors brought as much enthusiasm to this project as they have to any other, and it really shows. And they really have to be given double credit because there are SO many lines in the game. Imagine: each

examinable object in each away mission can be examined by each character for a different response.

### General Complaints

I have just a few complaints with A Final Unity.

Number one you've already read of: just too darned much information.

Number two is the poor save feature: only 9 save slots. To get more, you have to quit out of the game, backup your saved game file somewhere, restart, and rewrite over old slots. This is something that comes from the DOS world that never fails to frustrate me.

Number three is the RAM requirements: a hefty 12 MB. An informal conversation with a rep from Spectrum Holobyte revealed that the Mac programmers either didn't want to or didn't know how to use swap files on the Mac. So basically the game is using all that extra RAM to preload stuff. The game will run with virtual memory though, so while it might be a bit slow, at least it'll run. And if you do have 12MB of physical RAM, the game runs beautifully, fast and stable. One side effect of the high RAM requirement that really annoyed me, though, is that the game automatically quits the Finder on launch. Obviously, it's doing that to clear up much needed RAM - but if you've got the RAM to spare, there should be an option to disable this.

### Kudos

Since I always make a point of complaining about bad DOS ports, it's only fair that I point out that A Final Unity is, finally, a really good DOS port. With the single exception of the save feature, A Final Unity looks and feels like a game created for Mac people. High res art, high quality sound, and best of all, a manual written specifically for Mac users. Spectrum HoloByte gets my highest regards for their clearly written startup guide that should get even first time Mac users up and running in no time.

### Bottom Line

Overall, A Final Unity is an excellent game in every regard. Its single biggest weakness is its apparent desire to be everything to all people, which results in an overwhelming amount of information. Fortunately, you can ignore quite a lot of it. I'd recommend this game to any Trek fan with a Mac, regardless of their gaming skills. With all difficulties turned down, even the novice gamer can enjoy it. With sound, speech, and graphics so well done, it's just like watching a new episode of TNG - or like visiting old friends.

### Pros

- Graphics are as good as it gets
- Ditto for music and spoken dialog
- Interesting story
- So well done, it's actually like watching an episode on TV
- Difficulty levels make it accessible to any level of gamer

### Cons

- Hefty 12MB RAM requirement
- Overwhelming amounts of information
- Bad save feature
- Weak flight sim features

### Publisher Info

<http://www.holobyte.com>