

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE GAME

I'm 29 years old, author of the shareware game "The Missions of Starship Reliant!" which is coming up on three years old. In the real world, I'm making a career out of being a student; I'm currently enrolled in a dual degree M.D./Ph.D. program at the University of Illinois at Chicago, with the hope that someday -- some year -- I'll receive both degrees. Just recently I finished my graduate research in the field of cancer immunology, and currently I'm finishing up the final two years of medical school. I've been at all of this now for over six years, and perhaps a year and a half from now I'll be finished enough to say I'm a real "doctor doctor" with nothing more than a grueling residency ahead of me. Fun? I could think of other words.

The idea for the original game came from those classic Trek games, where you keystroked around from quadrant to quadrant, wherever those pesky Klingons were (designated in the long range scan by "102" or "013" or whatever), blasting away with torps and phasers without much real action. I thought, what if there was a game like that, but in real-time? A real Star Trek game with pictures of Riker and LaForge to interact with, and fast, intense battle. And, to make the game more enticing, I could arrange to have different game themes (missions?) that could be acquired later, so that the game itself wouldn't lose player interest as rapidly. After a lot of initial work, I decided to stay away from an actual Trek game and go more toward my own creation, not wanting to mess with people's preconceptions about Star Trek. Thus began the concept of Missions.

Programming began in February of 1993, but by April I realized what a mess I had gotten myself into. That realization came, not coincidentally, with the realization that animation programming on the Mac, at least fast animation programming, goes incredibly far beyond the huggable Toolbox routines one has at their disposal. After many desperate cries of help in comp.sys.mac.programmer, I came across a helpful fellow named Ingemar Ragnemalm, who spoke of his project called "Sprite Animation Toolkit". After describing my project to him, we agreed SAT would be perfect for this sort of game, and he let me be a beta tester for the toolkit. It saved my life; without the animation to worry about, I could focus more on the game and less on the real technical stuff, which would have taken a lot of extra time to learn. Because I had to junk everything I had written to that point (not much, really) and start again, I consider the actual programming of Missions to have begun then, at about the beginning of May '93.

One full year later, I released version 1.0 of The Missions of Starship Reliant! to some local First Class BBSs and America Online. It's hard to believe I worked on it for that long, but there were so many different things to install in the game, most of which had to be learned as I went along. But with the aid of the THINK Pascal manuals and the Inside Mac volumes, not to mention the indispensable THINK Reference program, I'd have to say that was the best part of the whole project; that it was all one long, incredible learning experience. Even if the game didn't succeed, I knew I had succeeded. As my father once said in a letter to me some years back, "Sometimes we put so much emphasis on what we've produced (or, worse yet, on what others think of what we've produced) that we miss the essential point of creation: It's a process, not a product, and it's the joyfulness of the experience that defines it and you, not just the product." I think it applies well. And I believe it's what made this all worthwhile. Even if my Ph.D. advisor would slaughter me if she found out how much time I did not spend reading papers or working in the lab.

Soon after, my game found its way onto the Internet at Sumex and UMich, and onto CompuServe and eWorld. I had no idea what to expect when I released it, but the indication from my beta testers was that it would do well. The response I got was swift and incredible, and I knew right away I was in for a fun ride. Aside, of course, from the numerous (and frustrating) crash reports, most of the letters I received in the first few weeks were tremendously complimentary. Within the first month I received letters from two or three companies looking to acquire or distribute the game, and by the second week of release I had already received the first few registration checks. Wow, money! The system seemed to be working. Then came a letter telling me the game had been nominated for Best New Shareware Game to be announced at the Mac Expo in Boston, and that it would appear (however briefly) in MacUser. Unreal. When it received Honorable Mention, it blew me away. In the nearly three years since

its release, it has been a wild trip.