



COMSTAR

Newsletter of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek Club*

December, 2003

Be sure to attend the 2003 *U.S.S. Chesapeake* holiday party!

Be sure to come and celebrate the season with the crew of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek Club* on Saturday night, December 20, for one of our club's most popular and enjoyable events of the entire calendar year!

This year, the meeting will be held at the Gaithersburg, Maryland, home of Chief Engineer Scott Klein.

We'll kick off the festivities with our dinner at 5:00 p.m., which is once again being coordinated by Second Officer Phil Margolies. Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard will be cooking turkey, so be sure to come hungry and bring plenty of food to share with your crewmates.

Enterprise season reduced to 24 episodes

Last week, *Mediaweek Programming Insider* columnist Marc Berman reported a rumor that UPN was considering moving *Star Trek: Enterprise* from Wednesdays to Friday nights.

Later on, Berman said: "Just yesterday, UPN assured me that *Star Trek: Enterprise* is by no means moving to Friday. Although ratings are down

At 7:00 p.m., we'll start our monthly business meeting, which will include signing birthday cards, finding out the most recent news in *Star Trek* and other science fiction, and planning panels for the Farpoint convention to be held in Hunt Valley (north of Baltimore), Maryland, in mid-February. We'll also discuss other upcoming conventions.

Then, once the business portion of the evening is done, we'll enjoy our annual gift exchange. Be sure to bring at least one wrapped science-fiction-related gift costing no more than \$20. Scott Klein will coordinate this annual club event. ■

year-to-year, the sci-fi drama still has an audience."

However, reporter Garth Franklin cited a memo allegedly leaked from Paramount stating that the current *Enterprise* season will be reduced from 26 to 24 shows. According to *TrekWeb*, this rumor has been confirmed by Paramount, a first for a *Trek* series. ■

CAPTAIN'S LOG: John-Luck Pickerd

I must really be in the holiday spirit this year. In November, I gave thanks for my favorite *Star Trek* captain, James Kirk, and this month, I can sum up my feelings about the next captain in my “countdown” by using two words forever associated with Christmas: “Bah, humbug!”

Yes, Jean-Luc Picard is my least favorite *Trek* captain. In fact, I don't think the Frenchman with the British accent ever should have been in charge of the *Enterprise D* during *The Next Generation*. His fondness for talk qualified him to be an ambassador, not commander of the most powerful ship in Starfleet!

Let me cite a particularly infuriating example of Picard *inaction* instead of *in action*. During the fourth-season episode “The Wounded,” the Cardassians were secretly breaking their treaty with the Federation, and the *Enterprise* was sent in to look tough but do nothing, which was

Picard's specialty.

However, when the captain of the U.S.S. *Phoenix* actually tried to expose the Spoonheads' duplicity, Picard took him into custody. Then, at the end of the episode, Picard told Gul Macet (Marc Alaimo in his pre-Dukat days) that he knew Ben Maxwell was right all along but noted grimly: “We'll be watching.”

To which I reply: *So what!?!?* What would Picard do if the Cardies continued to defy the treaty? Arrest another starship captain? Give the bad guys another stern warning? Throw a cup of tea at them?

Like the other captains, Picard was intended to be a product of the time in which he was created. As a lead in the 1960s, Kirk was a man of action who tended to dominate his show's screen time. But two decades later, programs like *Hill Street Blues* and *L.A. Law* made ensembles popular, with the “senior character” only appearing as often as the other actors in the cast.

That's how it was *supposed* to be with Picard. However, as *Next Gen* got rolling, Patrick Stewart noticed he wasn't going down to the planet or getting the space babes like Shatner did in *Classic Trek*. When Stewart asked why, he was essentially told: “This is the 1980s. TV is different now. You get something good to do every now and then. Relax.”

Nevertheless, Stewart continued to press for more air time, and things eventually got so tense that the producers gave themselves a way of writing the flat, unemotional captain out of the show by turning him into the flat, unemotional Locutus of Borg during the third-season finale, “The Best of Both Worlds.”

But by the time the conclusion aired in the fall, Stewart had apparently convinced The Powers That Be that he was indeed the *star*, so Riker became a second-class first officer while Picard was always down on the planet.

It's not that Picard was great at solving problems, either. His method of choice was usually to state loudly and authoritatively: “I'm the captain, and I ORDER you to stop being trouble!” Thanks to the writers, that usually worked, but I did enjoy seeing Jean-Luc take a pounding when he used that strategy in “The Schizoid Man” and “Chain of Command.”

I only found myself cheering for Picard once in seven long years, during the second-season masterpiece “The Measure of a Man.” After Riker did such a great job convincing me that Data was a glorified toaster, Picard's brilliant rebuttal was actually inspiring! If only that captain could have been that cool every week.

As for a defining moment, it came for me during “Homeward,” an episode in *TNG*'s final season. When the doomed people on a dying planet faced extermination, Picard stood and led a “moment of silence” for them, and he actually got mad at Worf's adoptive human brother for secretly using the *Enterprise* to rescue them. All I could do was throw up my hands and say: “I gotcher moment of silence right *here*, pal!”

Like the rest of *The Next Generation*, Picard had a rocky transition from the small screen to feature films. In each movie, Jean-Luc became more and more like James T. to the point that I expected him to actually start wearing a toupee. But by outflopping *Star Trek V*, *Nemesis* has apparently put an end to Picard's tedious career—without even a moment of silence.

Next time, I'll start the new year right by discussing the final *Trek* captain. Until then, Happy Holidays to the crew and friends of the U.S.S. *Chesapeake!* ■

Captain Randy Hall



Captain Jean-Luc Picard in appropriate holiday garb.

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SCIENCE TREK: Back to the future

A couple of days ago (today actually, but by the time you read this ...), Ann and I trekked down to Richmond, Virginia, and got our new Mini Cooper (Indi blue with a white top, sunroofs and a 1.6-liter, four-cylinder, 115-horsiepower engine, if you must know). What once was is now again.

It's the same with the U.S. space program, apparently. Following China's first launch of an astronaut into orbit and that nation's declared intention to land on the moon by 2020, the U.S. is considering a return to our natural satellite. Perhaps not so surprising, given our reason for getting there in 1969: political victory, nationalistic pride, defensive posturing and, oh yes, exploratory curiosity. Not to say the last is least—that is, to millions of science-fiction fans who wondered: "What took us so long?"

Unlike the competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that took us from 1961's "land a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth" to 1969's "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." (Notice the choice of masculine words—that's a column for another time.), China's plan looks like this: lunar orbiter (launched in 2007 to circle the moon for a year), robotic lander (2010) and human landing (2020), a less ambitious program for perhaps a less ambitious time.

Speaking of ambition, does anyone recall the last U.S. president to make a hard push for a long-term space exploration strategy? If you answered George H. W. Bush, you'd be correct. In 1989, then-President George Bush proposed a grand plan including a return to the moon and sending humans to Mars. The price tag: \$400 billion. The result: nada. (Okay, that price was for the fully loaded package—proposals existed at the time for options that could lead humans to Mars for far less). In 1996, then-President William Jefferson Clinton—on the non-literal heels of now-repudiated reports of life from Mars—suggested studying sending humans to the red planet.

So what does that mean for us? Unfortunately, probably nothing. There exist two basic drives in humanity's quest for a sustainable space-based society: the desire to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life forms and new civilizations, to boldly go—you get the picture—and the desire to solve all

of Earth's problems first; ending hunger, stopping racism, eliminating poverty, building a world of non-Western democracies, etc., etc. Of course, there are shades in between. The original race for the moon brought out excitement and fear, anticipation and dread. The new race brings: Well, didn't we already do that? What's next?

You know, if they could put a man on the moon, why can't they guarantee life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for every man, woman, child, dog, dolphin and fetus on the planet? Don't mind, of course, the obvious question—what does one have to do with the other?

Now, this is not to say I don't think we're going back to the moon or that we shouldn't go. Rather, there needs to be a compelling reason. A century before this December 17, two brothers from Ohio launched the first flying heavier-than-air vehicle. Within decades, airplanes were soaring around the globe, carrying people, packages and information. On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first craft to enter Earth orbit, Sputnik. Since then, hundreds of space craft—most carrying not a single human—have circled the Earth or journeyed to other worlds. Why then within four years of the first step onto the moon came the last?

Certainly, there is much science to be gained, yet many scientists believe robotic missions are less costly and can yield far more data. Sending humans into space is a risky business, as we saw so tragically this year. And there are many, many problems on Earth.

Why, then, should we return to the moon and venture to Mars? Because the journey will surely yield much that we seek: new science and new engineering to solve problems here on Earth, hope for our future and resources to sustain our world. Because we won't know if space is truly the final frontier unless we seek its borders.

Web Notes:

- <http://www.cnn.com/2003/TECH/space/12/04/us.moon/index.html> (Another few steps);

Continued on page 6



ART CREDITS:
Dynamic Graphics 1,
Insert front
amazon.com 2, 5
NVTech 3, 6
startrek.com 4
farscape.com
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REFLECTIONS: The countdown, part 4

December 2, 2003. Not 10 minutes ago, I was giddy with anticipation. I was the epitome of happiness. It was as if I was a child again, and tomorrow was Christmas. I was waiting with baited breath (Isn't that an odd expression? It sounds as if one's diet consisted entirely of sardines and worms.), and I could hardly contain myself.

Now, it just so happens that my birthday was the very next day, but despite that, I was happy anyway. (Hey, I stopped celebrating my birthday years ago. It had something to do with a birthday cake and trick candles.) It was something much more important. That was the day *DS9's* seventh and final season was to be released on DVD!

At last, I would have every single episode of the BEST *Trek* had to offer at my fingertips! (Hey, don't you have them ALL on tape?) I would finally be privy to all kinds of behind-the-scenes information! (Hey, don't you know all that stuff already? Isn't that why you do panels at conventions?) Once I got this final set, it would be the end of my DVD collecting ... and that's when it hit me.

This is it. There ain't no more. All the pleasure I had in waiting for each release. All the joy of carefully opening each container so as not to disturb each season's cast photo. All the heavy sighs of relief as I watched each disc of extra and behind-the-scenes footage is now over. I have nothing to look forward to except running for president. This is EXACTLY how I felt as the seventh season was winding down, except then, I knew the end was coming. This time, it kind of snuck up on me.



There is footage of the wrap party for the end of the series' run, and at the party, Avery Brooks gave such a stirring speech that it had me thinking about it and the show for hours after I had watched it. I will NOT cry! (Sniff!)

"When It Rains," story by Rene Echevarria and Spike Steingasser; teleplay by Rene Echevarria

Because of an adjustment that can only be made on Klingon ships, the Klingon fleet is the only one able to stand up against the new Breen weapon. The Klingons must protect the rest of the Federation until a way to counteract the Breen weapon can be found. Sisko sends Kira to Cardassia to teach them terrorist tactics, and Garak and Odo accompany her. Meanwhile, after testing samples of Odo's morphogenic matrix, Bashir discovers that he is indeed infected with the disease that is affecting the Changelings. Dukat sneaks a peek at the Kost Amogen text and is blinded for his trouble. Winn throws him out on the street as punishment, as if being blind isn't enough. Gowron takes over command of the Klingon fleet, wresting it away from Martok. Bashir and O'Brien discover that Odo was not infected by the female shape-shifter, but by Section 31. Directed by Michael Dorn.

Rating: ★★☆☆☆

"Tacking into the Wind" by Ronald D.

Moore

Odo starts to show symptoms of the disease that is spreading amongst the Changelings. Martok is almost killed in one of Gowron's wild raids. Sisko is not happy, and neither is Worf. The Cardassian uprising is causing lots of trouble for Weyoun and the female Changeling (Morphin' Mindy). Kira and Damar (da merrier) plot to steal a Breen weapon, and during the actual operation, Damar saves Kira's life. Worf, having enough of Gowron's incompetent leadership, challenges his authority, which in Klingon means you have to fight. They do, and Worf kills Gowron. Worf is now legally chancellor. He gives the title to Martok. Meanwhile, Bashir and O'Brien race to find a cure for the shape-shifters' disease.

Rating: ★★☆☆☆ ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard

RANTINGS: One extra large cheese pizza finally got here

Star Trek V: The Final Frontier-Special Collector's Edition arrived just in time for you to shove it in someone's stocking. Hey, I'm as kinky as the next guy, and if that makes your socks go up and down, then knock yourself out. *Caveat emptor*. This is no director's cut. There is no restored footage, although there are a few deleted scenes on the geekcrap disc, but they don't add anything. If you think this is just another excuse for Paramount to sell *Trek* fans another copy of something we have already seen countless times and already have multiple copies of, congratulations! You just won the kewpie doll!

In addition to the feature film audio track, William Shatner and his daughter, Elizabeth, provide the director's commentary on separate channels. Michael and Denise Okuda provide the text commentary, as they have on all the other special collector's edition DVDs. I must note that in watching the film this time around, it was better than I remembered. The thing that always bothered me about this film

was the ending felt like it had just been tacked on. For about 70 minutes of the film, Sybok was built up as a Vulcan madman, and you just waited for him to either be proved sane or for Jimbo to beat holy crap out of him. Unfortunately, what you came away with is that Sybok is just a "nice, confused guy who just made a mistake." Yeeeuuuuccchhh!!!!!!! Of course, this movie did have one of the best *Star Trek* lines: "Excuse me, but what does God need with a starship?" Alas, that is as good as it gets.

Over on the geekcrap disc, we get a brief glimpse of what might have been if the budget had not been cut out from under Shatner. There was some test footage of the infamous "rock man." Ten of these rock men were supposed to chase Kirk after he attacked "God." Unfortunately, Paramount cut the budget and only built one rock man suit, according to the disc. They filmed the test footage, but it was not what Shatner was looking for, so he scrapped it.

The *Star Trek* universe featurettes are nothing to write home about. The most interesting ones are "That Klingon Couple"

and "Herman Zimmerman: A Tribute." The other three featurettes are NOT. "Cosmic Thoughts" is a boring treatise on the philosophy of *Star Trek*. "A Green Future" is a boring treatise on the ecology of *Trek*. "Original Interview: William Shatner" is a boring treatise on the ego of Shatner. *These add absolutely nothing worthwhile to this collection!*

Some of the production stuff is interesting, such as the aforementioned rock man footage and deleted scenes, the makeup tests, the pre-visualization models and the trailers, but they do not make the movie fundamentally better. What's the point of including a pitch by Harve Bennett to the Paramount sales team? It's just a bunch of corporate rah-rah crap. Among the most thoroughly useless video exercises are "The Journey: A Behind-the-Scenes Documentary" and the "*Star Trek* V Press Conference," unless of course, you actually like listening to the verbal flatulence of William Shatner. (Sorry, I forgot. Randy, Wayne, David and Lorenzo will genuflect during all of this.)

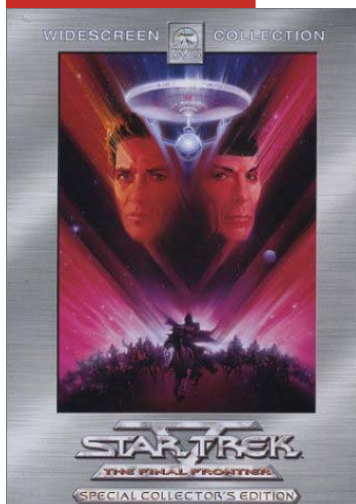
Rounding out this disc is the Advertising sections with the theatrical trailers and TV spots and the Production Gallery. If you've seen one *Star Trek* movie TV ad, you've seen them all.

So what's next? At the end of January, we have the *STVI: TUC-SCE*. Later in the year, the *Generations* special collector's edition will be out. Starting in February, Paramount will be grinding out the *Voyager* season-by-season DVD collections through the end of the year.

In the words of John Lennon: "And so this is Christmas, another year older, a new one just begun." Approaching the end of the year causes us to look back on what we have (or have not) accomplished. I feel no need to look back here. We all remember what has occurred, and it is for each of us to evaluate in the privacy of our thoughts. As for the coming year, I believe it will take a miracle for us to survive, and the Republicans have outlawed miracles. Anyway, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Just get me a drink.

The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance. ■

Officer Peter Chewning



COMING EVENTS

DECEMBER

December 20 Our annual holiday party! What will you get in the annual gift exchange? Plan now to attend! Check out the insert that is included with this newsletter for more details, including where we'll meet and how to get there!

JANUARY

January 17 We start 2004 with our first club meeting of the year! Where will we meet? What will we talk about? Watch this space!

FEBRUARY

February 13-15 Farpoint convention at the Marriott's Hunt Valley Inn, 245 Shawan Road, Hunt Valley, Maryland. Guests will include *Lost in Space* and *Babylon 5*'s Bill Mumy and *Lord of the Rings*' Brad Dourif and the Prometheus Radio Theatre. Cost will be: full weekend—\$50, Saturday only—\$35, Sunday only—\$25, Friday only—\$5. Questions? E-mail trekcontact@comcast.net. To register, write to: Farpoint Enterprises, Inc., 6099 Hunt Club Road, Elkridge, MD 21075.

February 21 Our February club meeting! We'll discuss the recent Farpoint convention and catch up on the latest *Trek*, sci-fi and club news.

HOLODICTATION: Coming up empty

In the 12-plus months I've been writing this column for the newsletter, I have always managed to find some interesting subject to write about, but I don't know how I come up with the subjects; I just do.

I'm sure my fellow writers have a system they use in coming up with subjects for their pieces. I usually get an e-mail from Wayne saying that he needs our columns, and I sit down and start to write. I haven't had any formal training in writing other than that given to the general high school and college student. I usually write about what is on my mind that particular night. Sometimes I'm amazed at how a column turns out or where it goes.

This time, I knew that I had to write my column and that the deadline was drawing closer. I thought of the Christmas season or the recent snowstorm but just couldn't find the right words to write about it. I've been on a roll and knew that I could find something to write about. Like in many things that we do, sometimes we try so hard, and sometimes we come up with "faldergarb."

What can I tell you folks? You got me. I don't have a subject to write about this month.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah, Happy Kwanzaa and Happy New Year.

"Dodging bullets." ■

Weapons Officer Patrick McBee

SCIENCE TREK: Back to the future continued

Continued from page 3

- <http://www.cnn.com/2003/TECH/space/11/29/china.moon.ap/index.html> (China starts to walk);
- http://www.biblioinfo.com/moon/sf_moon.html (Mooning sci-fi);
- <http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/nonfiction/kbspace.htm> (How science fiction lost the space race);

- <http://www.floridatoday.com/space/explore/stories/1996b/080896b.htm> (A Democrat in space);
- http://www.space.com/spacenews/spacenews_businessmonday_030714b.html (To infinity and beyond!); and
- <http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue65/site.html> (Science versus fiction) ■

Second Officer Phil Margolies



Happy Holidays!

CLUB BIRTHDAYS:
Birthday wishes to Communications Officer Marc Villa on Friday, January 2, and Captain Randy Hall and Chief of Security Wayne Hall on Tuesday, January 13.