



John Rhys-Davies (left) poses with Ray Bradbury and Bob Picardo at the recent "Wild About Mars" conference.

Trek stars help recognize Mars rover arrival

Tim Russ (Tuvok on *Voyager*), Robert Picardo ("the Doctor" on *Voyager*), John Rhys-Davies (the holographic Leonardo da Vinci on *Voyager*), Eugene Roddenberry,

Jr., Gene Roddenberry's son, and Andre Bormanis, executive story editor on *Enterprise*, were among the dignitaries on hand from the worlds of science and science fiction to see the first images to arrive from the surface of Mars by NASA's latest Mars Exploration Rover mission.

On January 3 and 4, the Planetary Society hosted a conference entitled "Wild About Mars" at the Pasadena Convention Center (same location as the annual Grand Slam *Star Trek* convention), where the public had an opportunity to view real-time feed from the Spirit lander via NASA's nearby Jet Propulsion Laboratory. The Spirit landed on Saturday, January 3, to search for water and possibly life on the Red Planet.

While Russ was content merely to observe, Picardo was on stage Saturday with renowned science-fiction author Ray Bradbury to present one of Bradbury's tributes to exploration. Also that evening, Bormanis moderated a panel of science and sci-fi writers.



Mars

Rhys-Davies, who flew in from England for the event, was on hand both Saturday and Sunday, and he performed dramatic readings from Bradbury's collected works.

Astronaut Buzz Aldrin—the second man on the moon and a strong *Star Trek* fan—attended the conference on Sunday with other guests to discuss the topic "Future Human Exploration of Mars." Eugene introduced that panel.

Spirit is the first of two rovers to touch down on the fourth planet in January. Its twin, Opportunity, is scheduled to land on January 24. The rovers are designed to study the history of water on Mars, equipped with a robotic arm, a drilling tool, three spectrometers and four pairs of cameras to capture a 3D view of the terrain. Each rover can travel as far as 100 meters in one day, far exceeding the range of the 1997 Pathfinder mission.

During the same weekend, conference attendees also saw images returned from the Stardust craft, which flew through the tail of Comet Wild 2 on January 2, capturing particles that it will bring back to Earth.

For more information on the "Wild About Mars" weekend, visit their website at www.planetary.org. ■

Start out 2004 by attending our January meeting!

Time to start the new year out right!

The next meeting of the U.S.S. *Chesapeake* will be held on Saturday, January 24, at the Germantown, Maryland, home of Chief Morale Officer Scott Nance and Veterinarian Kathleen Summers.

We'll gather around 6 p.m., then head to a local restaurant for dinner. We will return to the Nance/Summers residence by 8 p.m.

During the club meeting, we'll discuss upcoming conventions, find out what fellow club members are up to and get the latest on *Star Trek* news, as well as an update on other areas of science fiction.

Do you need directions to this month's meeting? Then please be sure to check out the insert that is included with this month's newsletter. ■

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CAPTAIN'S LOG: Journey of the Emissary

Happy New Year to the members and friends of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake*! While we had lots of great times during 2003, let's hope for even more in '04!

Now, I'm going to wrap up my "Captains Countdown" by discussing Benjamin Sisko of *Deep Space Nine*.

As a group, the *Star Trek* captains really haven't changed much during their stints in command. When we met Kirk, Picard,

Janeway and Archer, they were already captains, and unless something unexpected happens on *Enterprise*, all four will have ended their tours of duty pretty much where they began. (Still, Kirk and Janeway did get promoted in the movies.)

This was definitely not the case with Captain Ben Sisko. Our introduction to the only black lead character in *Trek* came during the horrific defeat at Wolf 359, where he lost not only the ship he served on, but the woman of his dreams as well. The embittered commander then grudgingly accepted a post on a tattered space station far from the main routes of the Federation.

Part of the genius of *DS9* was starting the series at a place where the characters had plenty of room to develop over the ensuing seven seasons. At this point, Sisko was almost entirely absorbed in his personal problems. He had a teenage son to raise without his beloved wife, and running a station the Cardassians had trashed before abandoning wasn't exactly his idea of a dream job.

But no sooner had Sisko arrived on Deep Space Nine than he was thrust into the role of an important religious figure for aliens on a nearby planet and helped discover a portal to the other side of the galaxy, events that would turn his backwater command into a central battleground in a war to determine the fate of not one, but two quadrants of the universe.

However, one of the obstacles to be overcome was some fans' hostile reaction to Avery Brooks' very realistic portrayal of Sisko as a military commander. Every summer, rumors flew that Paramount had finally had enough of Brooks' "wooden" performances, and one of the Rikers was coming in to save the show.

Little did we know that behind the scenes, Brooks was fighting to make his series the only true ensemble of the *Treks*. And as Sisko became more comfortable with his situation onscreen, fans became more comfortable with Sisko, the only captain we got to see promoted to his rightful rank.

When the *Defiant* was added to the mix, it wasn't just another ship; it was one connected to Sisko. And when Worf joined the cast, Sisko quickly became his mentor in the rigors of command—and life as a Klingon!

Nevertheless, the other characters on our favorite space station also got room to grow (especially Jake, who went from the shortest member of the cast to the tallest). As a result, the entire show developed an unusual richness and depth, even for *Star Trek*.

Picking a defining moment for any character from *DS9* is really tough. But for me, Sisko came into crystal clarity during the end of "In the Pale Moonlight," when my second favorite captain realized just how much "plain, simple Garak" had used him to draw the Romulans into the Dominion War.

When Sisko arrived at Garak's shop, I feared he would follow Picard's course of action: strut around, remind the Cardassian who's really in charge around here and stomp out in righteous indignation. Instead, Sisko did what my favorite captain would have done: slugged him in the face!

But then, when the Spoonhead spy got up, Sisko went beyond what Kirk would allow himself to do: He hit Garak *again*! And who knows what awful shape the tailor would have been in if he hadn't hit the captain with his worst weapon: the truth that Sisko needed Garak to do what he did.

By the time we reached "What You Leave Behind," Sisko had become a war hero and even accepted being the Prophets' Emissary to the Bajorans. Some were unhappy with the captain's fate at the conclusion of *DS9*, but not me. What better way is there for a bitterly self-absorbed man to demonstrate he'd completed his journey to an unselfish hero than by sacrificing himself to save the universe? I mean, there's always the relaunch novels and the movies, right?

Next time, I want to share some thoughts on this season of *Enterprise*! ■

Captain Randy Hall



Captain Benjamin Sisko.

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SCIENCE *TREK*: The future is now the present

Think about it. A few weeks ago, 2004 was the future, but now it's now. (I don't want to scare you, but that's the way it will be with 2005 and 2006 and 2007, *ad infinitum*). And so, we find that what once was predicted or forecast has now come to pass—or not. Take, for example, the European Space Agency's lander Beagle 2.

Mars and bust

Scheduled to land on Mars Christmas Day, the lander has failed to report home. An accompanying orbiter successfully entered orbit around Mars, but so far, no signal from Beagle. We have been reminded many times in recent days that only a handful of Mars orbiters and even fewer landers (four now) have successfully reached the Red Planet. The future—as we learned so tragically nearly a year ago with *Columbia*—is still a dangerous place. The further we reach out from the pale blue dot we call home, the more we learn this critical lesson.

All is not lost, though, as the American lander Spirit (whose twin Opportunity will hopefully land just as successfully the day after our next meeting) bounced to a safe landing in a vast crater. That lander, which incorporates lessons learned from 1996's Pathfinder mission, has rolled off its platform and onto the Martian surface to begin three months of research. We may not be as far along as early science-fiction authors speculated, but that doesn't mean we aren't trying.

Trying indeed

Speaking of which, President George W. Bush recently unveiled an ambitious plan for the United States to return to the moon and eventually send humans to Mars (can't let those rovers have all the fun). The plan was met with a lukewarm reception, given the ongoing fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, a still-troubled economy and a feeling by some that other efforts (such as health care or social justice) should come first. Whatever the reasons for the plan and its eventual outcome, there is hope that one day, humanity shall explore the stars as we have the heights and depths of our world.

Closer to home

... in both body and spirit: Remember

those nanites that Wesley Crusher released on the *Enterprise D*? You know, the microscopic, self-replicating computers that became a life form and took over the ship? According to a recent study (article link in Web Notes below), they might be dangerous to humans, too. No, I don't mean by building miniature nukes and demanding equal rights. I mean by acting like viruses and such that can cross the internal barriers of our body—such as the blood-brain barrier. And no, I don't mean turning people into super humans ala *Jake 2.0*. Think viruses or foreign particles and the damage they could do. Not to say they will, but they could.

Invading the body

Is it a stretch to say the food you eat is like an invader in your body, possibly doing you harm? Many people likely feel this way, and one recent attempt to combat it is the Atkins-type low-carb diet. (I'm not doing it, but it seems like everyone around me is.) What does the future hold? According to *Trek*, to oversimplify globs of protein, carbs and fat transmogrified instantaneously into tea, Earl Grey, hot or hot-fudge sundaes. Now, whether these far-future combinations are in truth healthy or fattening, I don't know, but my guess—per Starfleet's PR literature—is that the former holds true. Though, to see Kirk or Riker after a few years, I'm not so sure.

Where does it all leave us? We've arrived in the future. Wait, it's now the present, so the future is still before us. But the flow of time is ever forward (certain theories aside), so the present is now the past. My head hurts.

Web Notes:

- <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap040114.html> (Picture this.);
- <http://www.cnn.com/2004/TECH/space/01/15/bush.space/index.html> (No, not a place for the azaleas.);
- <http://www.cnn.com/2004/TECH/space/01/15/offbeat.mars.reut/index.html> (Going to Mars soon? I wouldn't bet on it.); and
- <http://www.cnn.com/2004/TECH/ptech/01/09/nanotech.health.reut/index.html> (Byte bugs and the brain.) ■

Second Officer Phil Margolies



A NASA illustration of the Mars rover, Spirit.

ART CREDITS:

startrek.com 1, 2, 4
marsrovers.jpl.nasa.gov 3
washingtonpost.com 5
NVTech 6
desktopstarships.com
Insert front
Dynamic Graphics
Insert back

REFLECTIONS: The countdown, part 5

January 8, 2004. The city of Washington, D.C., was in pandemonium. A collective state of euphoria gripped the town. Everyone seemed to be affected. Ever since the announcement, almost everyone had been in a state of perpetual happiness.

I, myself, also succumbed to the feeling. I couldn't help but share in the excitement. There was literally dancing in the streets, and I was dancing right along. I hadn't been this happy since Tom Landry was fired by the Dallas Cowboys. I was so happy that I could drop a log!

You'd think the entire city was having a religious experience. It was as if the second coming of the Savior was nigh. "Long live the king! God bless the queen!" Uh, well, maybe that last one doesn't quite fit.

And what, you may ask, was the cause of all of this merriment and rejoicing? This festivity? This jubilation? This reveling? This revelry? This exhilaration? This conviviality? This jocularity? This jocundity? This gaiety ... uh, scratch that last one. What, you may ask, was all the excitement about? Beats me! I was psyched because I got to see all the *DS9* bonus disks that day. I think the city was abuzz about some football coach or some kind of crap of that nature.

"Extreme Measures" by Bradley Thompson and David Weddle

Kira and Garak bring the dying Odo to *DS9*. Bashir and O'Brien finally tell Sisko of their plan to lure someone from Section 31 to the station and use a Romulan mind probe (first seen in the episode "Inter Arma Enim Silent Leges"), illegal in the Federation, to try and extract information from this person.

They are successful. Sloan himself takes the bait and is captured. Sloan finds himself in a bio bed, restrained by a force field. Bashir informs him that he knows Section 31 infected Odo, so he knows they probably have a cure. He also knows that Sloan would never give him the cure, so that's what the mind probe is for.

Sloan is determined not to cooperate, so he attempts to commit suicide by activating a neuro-depolarizing device in his brain. Bashir manages to stabilize Sloan, but he has suffered irreversible brain damage and will die within the hour. Bashir instructs O'Brien to create a multitronic engrammatic interpreter, which will allow them to link their minds to Sloan's.

The real purpose of this story was to give Bashir and O'Brien a last adventure together. Again, this episode proved to be MUCH better than I remembered and has one of the best scenes of male bonding I've ever seen on television. The two of them, lying against the wall, both injured, both afraid they will never see their loved ones again, and they argue about liking each other better than their significant others. "You love Keiko," Bashir assures O'Brien, "but you like me more."

Rating: ★ ★ ★

"Dogs of War," story by Peter Allan Fields; teleplay by Rene Echevarria and Ronald D. Moore

The *DS9* crew waits for their new ship, a *Defiant*-class vessel named the *Sao Paulo*. Its shield generators have been reconfigured to counteract the Breen weapon. Before they disembark, Admiral Ross informs them of a special dispensation they have been granted, and the ship's name is changed from *Sao Paulo* to *Defiant*. Captain Sisko is pleased.

Garak, Damar and Kira walk into a trap on Cardassia Prime and witness the death of their terrorist cell. Barely escaping with their own lives, they take refuge in the house where Garak grew up. The Grand Nagus pays the station a visit; he is there to announce his retirement and name the new grand nagus. Quark is convinced that he is the one. So is Liquidator Brunt, who starts to suck up to Quark immediately.

Odo is well and not too pleased about Section 31's attempt at genocide. It's not so much Section 31 that he is angry at, since he expects such things from them. It's the Federation turning a blind eye to the entire ordeal that "frosts his oats." Garak, Damar and Kira hear that the Cardassian people refuse to believe Damar is dead as had been reported by Weyoun. They decide to use this to rally the people against the Dominion and start a revolution. Last but not least, Bashir and Ezri finally reveal their feelings for each other and share their first kiss.

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Next month: The third greatest series finale I've ever seen. ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard



Leeta and Rom receive unexpected news in *DS9*'s "Dogs of War."

RANTINGS: It's really dead, Jim

What do all these things have in common: *Star Trek*, the Washington Redskins, the right to dissent and the Democratic Party? They are all dead; the bodies just don't know it yet.

Has everyone made those resolutions? You know, the ones that you have every intention of keeping but somehow end up breaking for whatever reason: it is harder than you thought; it wasn't as much fun as you thought, etc. So what will the New Year bring? New wishes? Restored hope? Unfulfilled dreams? SSDD? All of the above? None of the above?

Well, if the last few years are any indication, it will probably be a continuation of the journey on the grinding road of monotony interspersed with moments of panic, amusement, blind terror, incredulity, dashed hopes, broken promises and about a million other things no one can even imagine.

I wonder who the *Star Trek* equivalent of Joe Gibbs is. Piller? Behr? Jeri Taylor? I don't know, but *ST: E* needs someone to try to save it. It has to be something short of resurrecting Gene. Of course, he is probably spinning his way out of his grave after some of the crap that has been propagated in his name.

Maybe they should put it in the hands of Leonard Nimoy. He does know the material. He was the director of *STIII: TFSF* and *STIV: TVH* and the executive producer for *STVI: TUC*, which I guess could be equated with winning three Super Bowls in 12 years. I honestly don't know if *Trek* can be saved, or even if it should.

So the Borg are invading Las Vegas. At the Las Vegas Hilton, the new *Star Trek* ride, the Borg Invasion 4-D, will run alongside the *Star Trek* Experience beginning in March. Hey, maybe we have finally seen the end of all those Elvis impersonators since they can all be assimilated. Thank you! Thank you very much! Of course, I hear Lost Wages is such a twisted place anyway. What the hell will a few million geeks in Borg costumes matter?

It's time for the digression. According to ousted Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, the war in Iraq was in the planning stage since January 2001, a full eight months before the 9/11 attacks. If this is true, that kind of blows the terrorist attacks as justification right out of the water. But does it surprise me that we were lied to by the administration? Is a bear

Catholic? Does a pope crap in the woods?

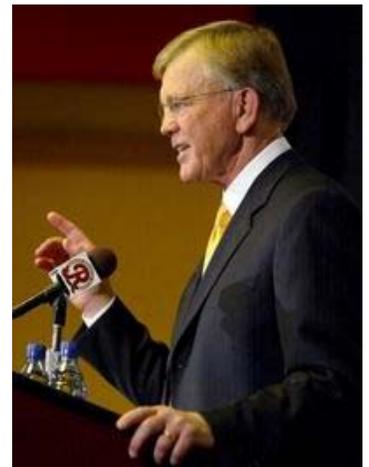
One thing that died in 2003 was our right to dissent. It seems that, in the interest of national security, we are not allowed to disagree with or even question our leaders anymore. We used to have a responsibility in this country to openly question our leaders. Being politicians, most of their actions were highly questionable anyway. But I guess our leaders decided that we, the people of the United States, were not intelligent enough to have our own opinions, much less express them. In some cases, I would tend to agree. Of course, in an era when the majority of the people get their information from slanted news outlets in 15-second sound bites that are tailored to the lowest common denominator, it really shouldn't come as any surprise. Rights are like a sex drive; you either use it or you lose it. How's that for tailored to the LCD?

Of course, since this will probably be the last TV season for entertainment programs on network television anyway, I guess it doesn't matter that *Star Trek: Enterprise* sucks. Like Steve Spurrier, The Powers That Be behind *Trek* are phoning it in, and what little quality there has been on *Enterprise* has suffered for it, so much so that the production schedule has been cut to 24 episodes per season. The suits figure that 24 episodes of a fourth and presumably final season will give them the magic "100 episodes of syndication." Who cares if the damn show is any good or not, as long as they can squeeze every last dime this pathetic bunch of socially inept freaks known as *Star Trek* fans have? They figure they will sell the episodes on DVD, and then we can go back to our parents' basement and not bother anyone ever again.

Depressed yet? Happy Freaking New Year.

When beggars die, there are no comets seen; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes. ■

Officer Peter
Chewing



Redskins Coach Joe Gibbs

COMING EVENTS

JANUARY

January 24 We start 2004 with our first club meeting of the year! We'll meet at the Nance/Summers home in Germantown, Maryland. For more information, check out the insert that is included with this month's copy of *COMSTAR*.

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, *Voyager's* Tim Russ (Tuvok) and the Prometheus Radio Theatre. Cost will be: full weekend—\$50, Saturday only—\$35, Sunday only—\$25, Friday only—\$5. Have any 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/anniversary celebration! We'll discuss the recent Farpoint convention and catch up on the latest *Trek*, sci-fi and club news. More on this meeting next month!

MARCH

March 20 Time to "spring" into our March club meeting! Watch this space for more information.

APRIL

April 17 Spring is about to be sprung! Don't miss this month's meeting!

HOLODICTATION: Is being dependent, dependable?

When we, as humans, are born, we're completely dependent on our parents. With each passing year, we become less and less dependent on our parents and exert our independence. This is hardwired into our DNA.

When I was growing up, I lived in the same house as my grandparents, and as I was growing independent of my parents' care, I was being depended on by my parents and grandparents to do little, but important, jobs. Each of us had these jobs when we were children: taking out the garbage, mowing the lawn and shoveling the snow. I dreamed of the day when I would not have to worry about such trivial things and would concern myself with **BIG, IMPORTANT** things like business deals and signing contracts, etc.

Then, I got older. And as I grew older, I found out that the more I wanted to be independent, the more dependent I was on other people. When I was working for the Department of Highways, I was dependent on the truck drivers to get me to and from the job site, and now that I'm a dispatcher, I'm de-

pendent on the person to come in and take my place so I can go home. When I got used to that, I thought that was it. Boy, was I wrong!

Then, I got married. Now, I have a wife and son I must depend on and who depend on me. I'm thinking, "I have this in order now," and I'm trying to make things run as smoothly as possible.

Will this happen? **NO!**

Let's add pets into the equation. Dogs and cats depend on us being dependable so they can be fed and litter boxes emptied and having them spayed and/or neutered.

I write this because, in my search for independence, I've found that having people depend on me is a big part of my life, so I am taking out the garbage, shoveling the snow, bringing in the wood and making sure the people I care about are being taken care of.

Will this quest ever end before I end up in Depends? I guess it all depends on my dependents.

Depending on you to read this. ■

Weapons Officer Patrick McBee



CLUB BIRTHDAYS:
Birthday wishes to
Chief Science Officer
David Brewer on Sun-
day, January 25, and
Xenobiologist Pat
McCoy on Wednes-
day, February 18.