

# COMSTAR

Newsletter of the U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek and Science-Fiction Club

August, 2004



Mayweather and the MACOs chase down an infiltrator on an upcoming episode of *Star Trek: Enterprise*.

## Spiner and Shatner to be guest stars on *Enterprise*?

*Star Trek: Enterprise* recently completed filming on the first two episodes of the show's fourth season, entitled "Storm Front," Parts I and II. They will wrap up the storyline begun in the third season finale dealing with the ship's return to Earth and Captain Archer's apparent capture by Nazis and a purple-headed alien.

Steps are being taken to help bolster the show's lagging ratings, including bringing back two actors well known by *Trek* fans.

Brent Spiner, who played Lieutenant Data in *The Next Generation*, has signed and been announced as a guest star for a three-episode arc this year. He will be playing Doctor Arik Soong, the ancestor of Data's creator, Doctor Noonien Soong, who appeared in the *TNG* episode, "Brothers." "And I'm not gonna tell you anything else about it because ... I don't know anything else about it!" the actor told assembled fans at a recent *Trek* convention.

And another guest star is rumored to be making an appearance this year. UPN has reportedly commissioned advertisements touting William Shatner's (James T. Kirk) return to *Star Trek*.

CBS Television City Research Center, located in Las Vegas' MGM Grand Hotel, is showing a commercial for *Enterprise*'s fourth

season announcing a guest appearance by Shatner, according to a post on the *TrekWeb* message boards.

During the preview of an episode of a new CBS comedy series, a few UPN commercials were shown, including one for *Enterprise*. That ad reportedly contained scenes from season three, followed by a *Star Trek* logo and a voiceover announcing that Shatner would be appearing in two episodes this season.

Rumors about Shatner making the "trek" to *Enterprise* have circulated since the series premiere in the fall of 2001, but they have picked up steam in recent months. Back in May, Executive Producer Rick Berman said the writers were looking for a way to bring Shatner on board the show. In June, it was reported the actor approached Berman with a "great story idea" for a guest stint. The only stumbling block at that time was that Shatner had signed as a regular on ABC's new drama series, *Boston Legal*, and would require time off to appear on *Enterprise*. Stay tuned for more details as they develop!

And that's not all the hiring on the show this year. Noted *Trek* authors Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens have been added as story editors. The Reeves-Stevenses, best known as novel writers, join Allan Brennert, another SF novelist and television writer. ■

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## Enjoy our annual pool party during this meeting!

The next meeting of the U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, August 21, at the Gaithersburg, Maryland, home of the parents of First Officer Abby Lindstrom.

We'll gather around 3 p.m. for our annual pool party (previously our club olympics) at a neighbor's home, then head out for dinner.

During the club meeting at 7 p.m., we'll discuss recent and 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.

Need directions to this meeting? Then please be sure to check out the insert included with this newsletter. ■

Captain Randy Hall's column will return in this space next month!



Captain James T. Kirk

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entire club.

"Star Trek," "Star Trek:  
The Next  
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Trek: Deep  
Space Nine" and "Star  
Trek: Voyager,"  
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## OFFICER'S LOG: Is the world (21st century and beyond) a safer place?

One of the classic arguments in *Trek*dom is whether Jean-Luc Picard of the 24<sup>th</sup> century is a better Starfleet captain than James Tiberius Kirk of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

In today's world, we have similar arguments over the political landscape—Bush or Kerry? Action or debate? Removing a deadly foe or containment? Preemption or consensus? And which course of action will lead to a safer world?

Much like President Bush, Kirk rarely pulls his punches. They both mean what they say and say what they mean, much to the amazement and frustration of their contemporaries.

Kirk was born in Iowa and became the youngest captain in Starfleet history; Picard was a Frenchman who ate croissants for breakfast. The world is a safer place because of men like Kirk.

Jacques Chirac loves John Kerry and would love Jean-Luc Picard, too. Captain Picard, like Kerry, prefers to debate the enemy rather than actually engage them. He finds few absolute rules in the universe except the Prime Directive—which states that Starfleet must pursue "non-interference" with pre-warp civilizations at all cost. Picard tries to find common cause with every freakishly annoying alien species that differs from homo sapiens only in that said alien has a silly prosthetic on its forehead. He would rather "dialogue" than slide the phaser's setting past "stun" to "kill." He has Starfleet at his disposal and yet somehow finds it difficult to beat many third-rate alien species.

There are multiple reasons why *First Contact* is the only decent *TNG* movie, and all the reasons involve attributes outside of Picard's character, and more like Kirk's character. I actually liked Picard in the movie, unlike the Picard who lets Kirk die in *Generations*, a dreadful film which also shows Picard losing the *Enterprise D* to an ancient Klingon ship.

This film is the equivalent of a World War II movie in which Charles de Gaulle allows the Nazis to execute George Patton and then lets an unarmed Fokker D.VIII defeat the RAF. Picard's military performance in *Generations* is beyond deplorable—it's grounds for a court martial.

A century earlier, Kirk was flying solo in

the wilds of the galaxy. He defeated Nomad without resorting to "understanding" the personality of a megalomaniacal robot probe; he defeated the Romulans in the first engagement ever with a cloaked adversary; and in one of his final, grand moments, he took action to clear his name and defeat the terrorists who were trying to prevent peace between the Klingon Empire and the Federation.

It was always Kirk's enemies, not his allies or peers, who understood his true measure as a man, a commander and a leader. They feared Kirk, but not the Federation. Kirk also didn't let the Prime Directive, or the Federation (a feckless, latter-day U.N.), get in the way of a superior law: the natural law of people, regardless of species, to the right of freedom. Kirk was willing to violate the letter of the law to promote its spirit—and the galaxy (and thus Earth) was better for it.

Perhaps the finest example of Kirk providing for a safer world occurred in "The City on the Edge of Forever." In this episode, Kirk was willing to lose the woman he loves, all the while knowing that it was necessary for maintaining the freedom of humanity. He knew fate was a cruel mistress, and he accepted it like a man.

Jean-Luc would have attempted to weasel out and establish a dialogue with Edith Keeler on the merits of her appeasement of the Nazis instead of letting a truck run her over and end a Nazi victory in World War II. No doubt he would have prevented her accident, the Nazis would have won the war, and he would have grown up with a German accent eating kugel for breakfast.

Kirk is a man. Like we see today with Ronald Reagan, he is more admired decades later for his vision, daring and willingness to do the right thing to defeat evil in his time, even when being vilified or ridiculed by others. There are no statues to Federation presidents or secretary-generals of the U.N. Sadly, Picard is something we'll have after society is finished eradicating the human male.

Give me someone who knows a hard day's work on a farm in middle America over an effete metrosexual pastry in the morning anytime. ■

Chief Engineer Scott Klein

# SCIENCE TREK: Measures of a mechanical man

You wouldn't know it, of course, but what follows is a column I've wanted to write for years and kept putting off. Finally, though, with the release of the Isaac Asimov-inspired Will Smith flick *I, Robot*, I'm actually writing it: a column that discusses a question I've had since the very first episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Does Data follow the Three Laws of Robotics?

## Background

Let's digress. The concept of automated, artificial or mechanical creatures has been around for millennia. Not until Czech writer Karel Capek's 1921 play, *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots), though, was the term "robot" brought to an unsuspecting world.

Robots in (science) fiction are often portrayed as havoc-wreaking, human-looking, stiff-limbed metal beasts, but in reality, a "robot" is much more than that.

To quote a quote from the first Web note below, "a robot is 'a reprogrammable multi-functional device designed to manipulate and/or transport material through variable programmed motions for the performance of a variety of tasks.'"

That is, while Harry Mudd's Stella was a robot (rather an android, or more appropriately, a gynoid, to coin a term), so are Opportunity and Spirit, the two Mars rovers.

Roger Clarke, in his Web page on robotics and IT, identifies three fundamentals that define a robot: programmability, mechanical capability and flexibility.

Today, we see robots—whether they assemble cars in Detroit or imitate puppies in Japan—strictly following their programming (we hope), whether or not that programming includes the ability to "learn."

Writing in the 1940s, when robotics (his 1942 term) was more fiction than science, Asimov (with the critical help of editor John Campbell) proposed three laws that defined how a robot should act. First expounded in his story "Runaround," the laws are:

**First Law:** A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

**Second Law:** A robot must obey orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

**Third Law:** A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

## Positronically Data

Fact Index (see Web Notes) describes the "positronic brain" as the hardware of a robot's mind, while the Three Laws are the software. Oversimplified, but you get the picture.

Asimov's concern was with the laws and how they affected robots' actions. The book *I, Robot* contains many of Asimov's early stories, where he posited the interactions of humans, robots and the Laws. To this science-fiction writer, the positron was just a new particle that could be used as "electron/electronic" are.

Paying homage to Asimov, Gene Roddenberry gave his android character, Data, a positronic brain. Perhaps the writers of *Deep Space Nine* would have investigated this question of Data and the Three Laws, but the *Next Gen* team simply seemed to latch onto the word "positronic."

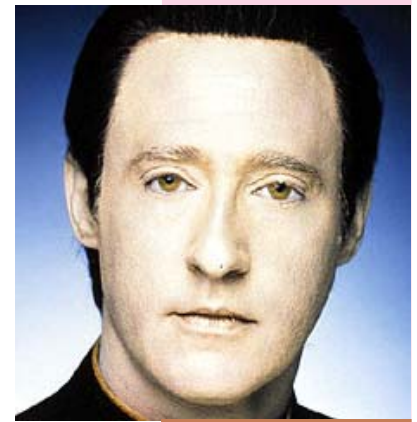
The question, then, is: Does Data actually follow the Laws?

While the last two Web notes below answer in the negative, we're still going to look into the issue. Darn it, I've waited this long to write this column, and now I'm going to find the answer!

Next month: Data and the First Law.

## Web Notes:

- <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/SOS/Asimov.html> (Robotics and IT, published by IEEE);
- <http://cache.ucr.edu/~currie/roboadam.htm> (History of robotics by Adam);
- [http://www.asimovonline.com/oldsite/Robot\\_Foundation\\_history\\_1.html](http://www.asimovonline.com/oldsite/Robot_Foundation_history_1.html) (Robots and Foundation. But it's the old site.);
- [http://www.fact-index.com/p/po/positronic\\_brain.html](http://www.fact-index.com/p/po/positronic_brain.html) (Well, gee, that answers my question.); and
- <http://www.pathcom.com/~boby/brain.htm> (I'm not the only one asking this question.). ■



Lieutenant  
Commander Data

ART CREDITS:  
startrek.com 1, 2, 3, 5  
images.google.com 4  
Presentation Task  
Force 6  
desktopstarships.com  
Insert front  
shore-leave.com  
Insert back

Second Officer Phil Margolies

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## REFLECTIONS: Great “X”pectations

There was a bold new buzz in Genre-land, a new show that got all genre fans’ hearts all a-twitter. By the fall of ’94, a great deal of people in this country were smitten by the X bug. No, not those crappy teenage mutants from that crappy comic book or those crappy movies; *The X-Files* was beginning to take America by storm.

I remember the day that became clear to me. I was riding D.C.’s subway transit system, reading a magazine that had an article about the show. As I looked up to see what stop I was at, I noticed a very pretty but extremely young woman smiling at me. As the train slowed to a stop, she said to me: “I love that show!” Then she jumped up and ran off the train.

Now, I’m used to women running from me, and well they should, but I was struck by the fact that she noticed what I was reading and was familiar with the program. The second season had started, and *The X-Files* was a bonafide Top 20 hit.

Keep in mind that at the time, FOX still wasn’t broadcast in much of the country, so for them to have a Top 20-rated show was in itself a remarkable feat. This means that with the limited amount of affiliates FOX had and the limited amount of coverage throughout the country, nearly *everyone* in those affiliated markets was watching the show.

The second year was a very good year, in terms of stories. Not as good as year one, but both years two and three had some very interesting ideas.

The show’s mythology was fleshed out quite a bit in both seasons. As a result, the humor suffered. The show was still witty, but it wasn’t funny, a clear sign that the producers were starting to take themselves a little too seriously.

Perhaps they had reason to. Come the start of the third season, *The X-Files* had surged into the 10 most-watched programs on the air. The giant leap in ratings can be attributed to FOX’s brilliant decision to move the show from its Friday at 9:00 p.m. timeslot to 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, the most-watched night of television.

It took a lot of guts to move this series from its comfortable and safe timeslot, but FOX was smart to take advantage of the show’s burgeoning popularity and put it on

at a time when *most* people would be available.

The ratings jumped even more, and by season’s end, it had bullied its way into the top five, and David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson had become media darlings. Everything was right with the world: FOX was happy, Chris Carter was happy, and America was happy, but Duchovny was *not* happy.

Duchovny always considered himself better than television. He agreed to the series because he was sure it would be canceled in one season. He figured he’d get a steady paycheck for about a year, and then he’d be back doing film. The show’s meteoric rise to fame put a serious crimp in his film career, but he was bound by contract, and FOX execs would sooner kiss Rosanne Barr than let him out of it.

By this time, *The X-Files* had become such a phenomenon that it warranted its own conventions, ala *Star Trek*. Unfortunately, the stars of *The X-Files* could not or would not see the advantage of actually appearing at one. Duchovny would rather kiss Rosanne Barr than do a convention and actually scoffed at the notion. Doing a convention, that is, not kissing Rosanne. He came to work, read his lines and did his job, but he balked at any type of promotional work as if he was hoping the show would fail and he’d be free.

That was not to be, but by the fourth season, there was a radical change in the style of the show. The stories were done at a much slower pace, as if Chris Carter suddenly adopted a European film style, and the show dragged at a snail’s pace. The emphasis was switched from the cases to the stars, and *The X-Files* became the “Mulder and Scully Show” to, in my opinion, devastating results.

Not for FOX, though. The show remained VERY popular, although I’m sure that by this time, people were so used to watching the show that Duchovny could



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# RANTINGS: Be afraid, be vewy afraid!

In the Classic *Trek* episode, “Wolf in the Fold,” Kirk and company faced a creature that fed on fear generated among the populace of Argeilius.

Fear is very much on the minds of many these days. It can be a very effective weapon in motivating the citizens of nations. The Nazi Party created and maintained a climate of fear in Germany. Some of the fear was because whole sections of the populations (Jews, gays, intellectuals, liberals, etc.) were being rounded up and exterminated because they were “detrimental to the pure German state.”

At the present time, we have terror threat levels being ratcheted up based on “non-specific chatter,” with no one daring to question the timing and purpose until former Vermont Governor Howard Dean raised the possibility that the administration is jacking up the terror threat warning because Bush’s poll numbers are dropping. His policies have given us *the largest deficit in U.S. history*, but do you hear anything about it? No. Why? Because we have to be too scared to vote for someone else.

This administration has admitted that they “might have exaggerated the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.” They *exaggerated*? If that was an exaggeration, I’d hate to see their definition of a bald-faced lie. So now, when they raise the threat level based on “detailed plans of Al-Qaeda,” people express doubts and disbelief. Instead of reading “My Pet Goat,” he should have been reading “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.”

In the aforementioned episode, the creature could take over the body of others to kill and strike fear. It was a metaphor for the way that fear can grip any one of us. To paraphrase Michael Douglas in the movie *American President*: “Whatever your problem is, they are not interested in helping you with it. They are only interested in two things: making you afraid of it, and telling you who is to blame for it.”

Of course, preying on fear is not a unique thing to the Bush Occupation Forces in America; they are just the latest example of a longstanding tactic.

So what do we do? Well, FDR said: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” In the relatively innocent times of the 1930s and ‘40s, that may have been true. I wonder if there is any such thing as innocence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It certainly seems that no one can be trusted, that there is no one left to believe in.

I wish it were otherwise, but our choices for leaders seem to be limited. We are forced (*AGAIN*) to choose between the evil of two lessers (*AGAIN*). When was the last time in anyone’s memory that people actually voted FOR a candidate and not against one?

To defeat the entity in “Wolf in the Fold,” Captain Kirk had Doctor McCoy shoot everyone on board with a big dose of a good tranquilizer. That’s right; the good doctor got everyone on board stoned. While some of us could and would follow suit to ride out the times of fear, that really doesn’t solve anything.

However, I can now understand the reaction I have on those extremely rare occasions when I listen to “Right-Wing Radio.” I hear some of their spiel, and I frequently wonder if these people are on drugs. Well, if Rush Limbaugh and his “Hillbilly Heroin” is any indication, the answer appears to be a resounding “YES.” It would certainly explain some of the more arcane and reactionary aspects of conservatism.

As brilliant as I am, I could NOT make this up. The president said at the signing of the FY2005 Defense Budget: “Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we.” It seems like we have more to fear than they’d led us to believe. Well, he DID swear an oath to defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic, but this seems like one-stop shopping.

Can you imagine the look of abject horror on the face of his speechwriter? I wonder how the speechwriter copes with political appearances for the president when he mangles the English language. Heavy drinking, probably.

*And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.* ■

Officer Peter Chewning



Scotty is confronted by the murder weapon in Classic *Trek*'s “Wolf in the Fold.”

# COMING EVENTS

## AUGUST

*August 21* ..... Time for our pool party/summer outing! Plan now to attend this yearly fun club happening! For directions, see the insert that is included with this newsletter.

## SEPTEMBER

*September 18* ..... Football, falling leaves and ... our first meeting of the fall “brr” months! Be sure to watch this space for more information as it becomes available!

## OCTOBER

*October 16* ..... It would be a scary thing to miss the October meeting! Mark your calendar today!

## NOVEMBER

*November 20* ..... Be thankful that it’s time for the November club meeting!

## REFLECTIONS: Great “X”pectations

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stand completely still and pull large objects out of his butt for an hour, and America would still watch.

Some fans, those who had labored through the “unseen” season, were starting to

sense a serious drop in story quality, and the chosen few who made up the original viewership were starting to pull away and would NOT be around for the end.

Next month: The fall of the *Files*.

*Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard*

## HOLODICTATION: What the sign says

I’m amused at the barrage of advertisements that are thrust upon us in any 24 hours. I sometimes think that Madison Avenue is trying to find a way to beam ads into our sleep (but that’s another column).

You’re awakened by a *General Electric* alarm clock. (Yes, they do bring good things to life.) Then you stumble to the bathroom, and you’re asked to pass the *Charmin*.

When we shave, we want to look sharp, and then, we clean ourselves with *99 44/100<sup>th</sup> pure* soap. We all want that *Colgate* smile, and then we fix our hair (those of us that still have some). A little dab will do ya. We put on our *Levis* and our *Nikes*. (We just do it.)

When we get down to the kitchen, we all want to feel GRRRRREAT!

We all go to work and have to drive, so we either are seeing the USA or we have a better idea.

Then, if we listen to the radio, we’re clobbered with ads for everything from new

cars to getting in touch with our libido. We also get ads in the paper, on the Metro, in our office buildings and every time we log onto our computer. We see ads on TV, billboards and on the shopping carts at the grocery store. And now, we have ads before the movies ... and even in the movies!

Everyone who knows me knows I like to watch NASCAR racing. Now, these are 43 billboards going around the track at 200 miles per hour. Sponsorship is the life and death of a race team.

Some people (with too much time on their hands, I think) say that it’s not right to advertise alcohol and tobacco at the race-track. They say it sends a bad message to people and will make them want to go out and buy those products. I’ve been watching NASCAR for about five years. I’ve never wanted to go out after a race and grab a pack of *Winston’s* and a six-pack. If I do, then the advertisers have done their job!

“I’m just lovin’ it.” ■

*Weapons Officer Patrick McBee*

