

COMSTAR

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

October, 2004



Enterprise will “trek” into the DVD universe in 2005

If you've been buying the *Star Trek* DVDs since *Classic Trek* first began being released, there is good news for those wishing to complete their collections. *Star Trek: Enterprise* will join the DVD sets in 2005.

The website tvshowsondvd.com recently reproduced Paramount's announcement of its 2005 DVD plans, which include *Enterprise* through the current season. The schedule would see the first season released during the first half of the new year, with subsequent sets in the summer, early fall and near Thanksgiving. Thus, all four seasons will be available by the winter holidays next year.

Another improvement to the show this year is that it is being filmed and broadcast in digital format.

To commemorate this change, Sony Electronics, in conjunction with Paramount Television, sponsored a premiere party for the first episode of the new season, "Storm Front." The cast and crew of *Enterprise* were in attendance, along with press, executives from Paramount, UPN and Sony, and special guests from the military.

The evening commenced with the introduction of Andrew Stucker, general manager of digital production systems for Sony, to talk briefly about the advantages that come with this new camera system now used by Director

of Photography Marvin Rush and the *Enterprise* production team. Stucker pointed out how this was the first time a *Star Trek* production has been shot using digital photography. The camera, a Sony HDW-F900 Digital Camcorder, uses the Sony Cinealta 24P High-Definition technology to provide a seamless blend of special effects and live action. The projection for the evening's entertainment was also done digitally to complete the experience.

Co-creator and Executive Producer Rick Berman said now was the right time—as fellow Executive Producer Brannon Braga later agreed—to make the switch to digital as the technology was at a place that matched, or even surpassed, normal 35mm filmmaking.

Rush said that he "felt it would be an easy transition." He noted that working with film would not allow much more flexibility since film has to be sent out to be developed before it can be checked. "This system works better than film," Rush concluded.

Scott Bakula (Captain Jonathan Archer) wasn't as comfortable as Rush with the transition. "I was nervous about going (to digital)," he noted. Now, Bakula feels that the digital format is able to show everybody's work much more effectively than what was used before. ■

Don't miss our next meeting on October 23!

The next meeting of the U.S.S. Chesapeake *Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, October 23, at the Laurel, Maryland, home of Chief of Computer Operations John White and Starfleet Intelligence Officer Annie White.

We'll gather at 5 p.m. at the Whites' house to decide what we'll do for dinner.

Starting 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. ■

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

BOOK REVIEW: Mission Gamma—Twilight

It's safe to say now that the first two books of the *Deep Space Nine* relaunch project, *Avatar 1* and *2*, were a huge success, both critically and commercially. Sales were great, and the fan buzz was incredible and overwhelmingly positive. Senior Editor Marco Palmieri erased all doubt as to whether or not he had his finger planted firmly on the pulse of what made *DS9* exceptional.

Keeping in mind that no matter how great the plots were, the bread and butter of the show was its characters, the *Avatar* books hit home on every level and not only captured the essence and humanity of the show, but also succeeded in laying new ground and furthering the mythos of the program and its characters.

The only real question that remained was: Could they do it again? They'd hit pay dirt with the first two stories, but as I've always said, "Everyone has at least ONE great story in him." Was it a fluke, or was Marco Palmieri surrounding himself with decent writers? As author David R. George III proved in the first book in the four-part *Mission Gamma* series,

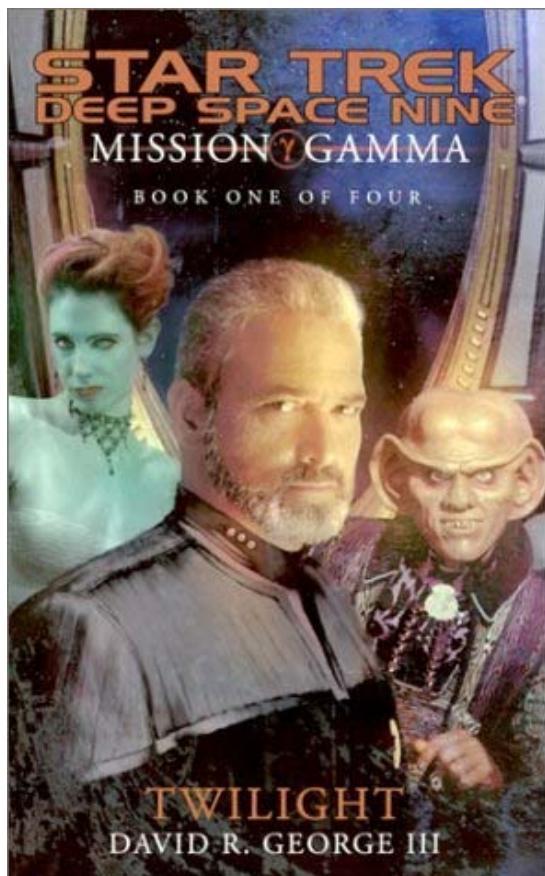


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the answer to my first question was a resounding YES!

Commander Elias Vaughn takes the *Defiant* through the wormhole and into the Gamma Quadrant for some good, old-fashioned space exploration. With the Dominion no longer a viable threat, Starfleet feels its time to chart the Gamma Quadrant and to once again boldly go where no man has gone before. They encounter a race of beings called the Vahni, who seem to live a peaceful existence—that is, until a pulse wave rips through their space, striking the planet and killing hundreds of the inhabitants.

Meanwhile, back on Deep Space Nine, the Bajorans must prepare for admittance into the Federation, something they had long sought. Unfortunately, the planet is on the verge of a theological crisis, and Kira Nerys may well be the cause, not to mention the unknown forces that conspire to make sure Federation membership remains elusive.

Also on the station, the improbable happens. Quark hires a Dabo man. Hilarity ensues, but so does profit. Can Quark put aside his chauvinistic pride for profit? The answer will surprise you.

Twilight is a great book, full of both familiar moments and surprises. At 504 pages, it's a long read, and the type is unusually small. But if you can overcome these obstacles, there's really one heck of a story ahead of you.

Once again, the characterization is flawless. You can hear the characters' voices as you read their responses. The story is as unpredictable as the series was, and there's always some little cliffhanger at the end that leaves you not only wanting more but dying to re-read the book again. I'd say more, but I think I'll read it one more time.

Rating:

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard

SCIENCE TREK: Are you talking to me?

I just realized something: This is my 100th Science Trek column in COMSTAR. Just for the record.

To paraphrase that epitomic episode of *Star Trek*, "Spock's Brain": Laws, what are laws? What indeed. Flipping open my handy dandy (and heavy!) *American Heritage Dictionary*, I find—okay, I won't bore you with a definition of law while you're thinking about presidential politics. Instead, I ask, why do we need laws? Considering definition #2b from my dictionary, laws are necessary to maintain social order and a just society. Unless you're a libertarian or an anarchist.

According to the Asimov FAQ (see Web Notes below for the URL), Asimov's intent in developing the Three Laws was to provide a "built-in ethical system" for robots (to stop all that taking over the world or those deranged killing sprees that can happen otherwise). That is, to maintain the social order and promote a just society for humans by restricting the independence of robots. Something to think about as we consider who should be our next leader. Vote the subliminal party!

Last month, in Round 1 of Data versus Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, we explored the first law: A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. This month, we turn to the second: A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

Let's start with where we left off, "The Most Toys." In this episode, Data is held captive by collector Kivas Fajo, who sees the android as a perfect addition to his collection of one-of-a-kind items.

As *Star Trek: The Episode Guide* explains in its synopsis: "Unable to escape, Data uses passive resistance to defy Fajo until his captor threatens to kill his own assistant, Varria, with a disrupter gun that slowly tortures its victims."

As we saw in last month's column, when Fajo threatens to kill his assistant (thus invoking the First Law), Data submits. However, the first half of the above sentence implies that the Third Law (self-preservation) is taking precedence over the Second

Law (obeying human commands—Data refuses to sit in his "special chair").

Our second example is another classic Data episode, "The Measure of a Man." Here, Data is put on trial by Starfleet to determine whether he is a free and independent human or a robot (android) that is the property of Starfleet. Between Riker's tough prosecutorial strategy and Picard's stalwart defense, the judge concludes that while Data is not human, he is a free and independent being.

Again we look to *The Episode Guide* for our Second Law situation: "Data is ordered to serve under Captain Bruce Maddox, who wishes to disassemble and study him so that more androids can be made for Starfleet's use. But after Data learns that Maddox may not be able to reassemble him, he refuses to submit to the procedure." Again, we see the Third Law take precedence over the Second.

So, if we were to make a conclusion about Data at this point, it could be that he is misprogrammed: The Third Law was given precedence over the Second. Such a case is not necessarily against what Asimov believed, but rather

would make an intriguing Asimov story.

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

Web Notes:

- <http://www.faqs.org/faqs/books/isaac-asimov-faq/part3/> (Isaac, Part 3—compare with Leonard, Part 6);
- <http://sttng.epguides.info/> (All 179 episodes, including the forgotten one, what's it called?);
- http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/how_might_humans_int.html (Keynote address from a 2001 Human-Robot Interaction meeting. Yes, there is such as thing.); and
- <http://www.asimovlaws.com/> (AKA "3 Laws Unsafe," this site asserts that Asimov's Three Laws may not be ethical or wise.). ■

Second Officer Phil Margolies



Picard defends Lieutenant Commander Data in TNG's "The Measure of a Man."

ART CREDITS:
startrek.com 1, 2, 3, 6
amazon.com 2, 5
images.google.com 4
desktopstarships.com Insert front
scifi.com Insert back

REFLECTIONS: X-onerated

"You can't go home again"—*Thomas Wolfe.*

The seventh season was lame. There's simply no other way to describe it. Oh, there were a few gems amongst the gravel (more on that later), but overall, the season turned out to be a narcissistic and self-indulgent bore. I got the impression that Chris Carter was being far too cute and flexing his executive productive muscles to see that the show was plunging into a dramatic tailspin. Duchovny's aloofness certainly didn't help matters ... or did it?

FOX finally relented and set Duchovny free, but not before paying him an ungodly sum of money in exchange for his appearance in six episodes in the eighth season. Duchovny's sincerest wish had come true. He was free to be a "movie" star. It would just be a matter of minutes before the Hollywood offers came pouring into his home, and Duchovny wanted to be ready to accept each and every one of them. Heck, he even agreed to be Mulder a few more times to keep his *X-Files* fan base happy.

With Mulder not around for most of the eighth season, the writers could no longer survive on "cute" storylines and Duchovny's popularity. They had to actually *write* to keep up fan interest. They had to sell the fans on a whole new character, John (HOT) Doggett. Doggett was regular F.B.I., complete with a no-nonsense attitude and large broom handle planted firmly up his rectum. Doggett had a tragic past, but it contained none of the extraterrestrial aspects of Mulder's. Or so we, and Doggett, were led to believe in the beginning.

John Doggett was all F.B.I. spit and polish, with absolutely NO predilection for unexplained phenomena and the supernatural, making him the absolute opposite of one Fox Mulder. When it came to that sort of stuff, he was totally clueless. He was an investigator, with a keen sense for getting at the truth. He was like a pit bull, relentless. Put him on a case, and he wouldn't stop shaking things until something shook loose, but he had no nose for the unexplained. In an extreme sense of irony, Scully and Skinner were no believers. Mulder had rubbed off on them, though it took eight years to sink in.

Some folks balked at a show with little or

no Mulder. Some fans delighted in increased screen time for Gillian Anderson. I'd always stated that I watched the show for the stories. It's not like I didn't care for the characters, but I've always said that if Mulder and Scully died, I'd still watch the show, and I was now being put to the test.

I for one was ecstatic! With the absence of Mulder, the show became *The X-Files* again! Emphasis was shifted back to the cases themselves, just like it was in the first three seasons, and the show seemed to breathe new life. Suddenly, a show that had mostly bored me for four years now had me eagerly awaiting the next episodes! It was *deja vu* all over again! Just like the good old days!

Once again, I was being regaled with witty, imaginative storylines worthy of being *The X-Files*. Of course, there were still the occasional episodes of indulgence and pomposity, but they were few and far between. The stories were engaging again, and with the ninth season being *The X-Files'* last, I was glad to see it go out with some semblance of the style that made it a great show.

Sure, some fans didn't like it; they'd grown fond of the constant soap opera tease that it had sunk to, but for me, it was a welcome sight. I could hold my head up proudly and say: "Yes, I watch *The X-Files*!"

Though the series finale did a clumsy job of attempting to wrap things up, complete with an appearance of Fox Mulder, it was a noble gesture, to say the least. And even though the fabled "affair" between Mulder and Scully was hinted at, thank God they didn't dwell on it. The show went out with a small but

stylish
bang, and I
think I can
live with
that.

Next
month, the
show's best
episodes,
season by
season. ■

Conn
Officer
Lorenzo
Heard



RANTINGS: Another extra large pizza: half ham, half cheese

OK. So lock up your liquor and hide your daughters. That's right. I'M BAA-ACK from my "vacation" in Margaritaville. Never did find my shaker of salt.

First, to explain my sudden return from my "sabbatical." It would be really easy to pass it off and say I ran out of tequila. (Impossible!) I'm following the example of Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn and starting to write again after a period in the gulag.

Now that I've been censored and the editor has made it clear that I'm not allowed to talk about anything outside the realm of *Star Trek* or science fiction in these pages, certainly not politics or anything else of note or interest, I will have to find other topics and new ways to piss people off.

Actually though, he did me a favor. His action puts me in some very good company; I can now join Linda Ronstadt, Whoopi Goldberg and others who have faced adversity for expressing dissent. Thank you very much. The only specific he said that he wanted to see from me was a review of DVDs. Sorry. I absolutely refuse to limit myself to that, but with the release of the *Star Trek: Generations* Special Collector's Edition DVD set, it seemed like as good a time as any to return.

This two-disc set contains the usual theatrical release of *Star Trek: Generations* and the audio commentary by Brannon Braga and Ron Moore on a separate audio channel and, as usual, text commentary by Michael Okuda and Denise Okuda. Lah-de-frickin'-dah.

As has been the case with the collector's editions since *Star Trek III*, the really interesting stuff is on Disc 2. The documentary, "The *Star Trek* Universe: A Tribute to Matt Jefferies," was particularly interesting about how he came up the design of a starship and how he has influenced science-fiction films AND NASA engineers. "The *Enterprise* Lineage" and "Creating 24th Century Weapons" are interesting as well.

The final documentary, "Captain Picard's Family Album," is a cure for insomnia. The rest of the production geek crap is pretty run of the mill: "Uniting Two Legends," "Stellar Cartography: Creating the Illusion" and "Strange New Worlds: The Valley of Fire" are pretty standard stuff, as is "Visual Effects

Inside ILM: Models and Miniatures Crashing the *Enterprise*."

If you really like scene deconstruction type stuff, then you hit the jackpot with "Scene Deconstruction Main Title Sequence," "The Nexus Ribbon" and "Saucer Crash Sequence." If not, you can give these a pass. "The Archives Storyboards and Production Gallery" can be ignored as well.

Now we come to the gold. The "Deleted Scenes: Orbital Skydiving" is the best piece in this all, though it could have been run through a time-base corrector to boost the video so that the leap off the orbital station is not so muddy. "Walking the Plank" just makes an already long scene go on longer. "Christmas with the Picards" is just boring; it adds nothing. The alternate ending has Soran shooting JTK in the back, and he dies. BFD. You had to know that Shatner wasn't going to let that one go. He wanted a "beautiful death" like Nimoy had in *Star Trek II*.

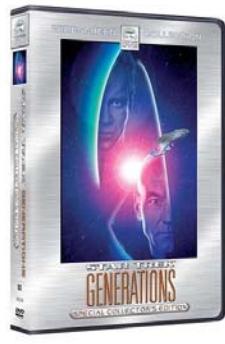
Speaking of his Shattness, as if his return to weekly TV in *The Practice* spin-off *Boston Legal* wasn't enough, they're still trying to get him to play Kirk on *Enterprise*. According to Berman, Shatner would play "an incarnation of Captain Kirk" in a storyline that "would have to do with an alternate reality." Sounds like the writers are getting lazy again.

But here's the turd in the punchbowl, kids. According to the *TrekToday* website, Paramount is pulling out of the deal because Shatner wants too much money. Gee, there's a big surprise on both sides. Shatner's greed clashes with Paramount's cheapness. Talk about the irresistible force and the immovable object. We'll see where this goes. By the way, Season One of *Enterprise* will be released next May, according to the Digitalbits website.

One last rumor to report. Jonathan Frakes is under consideration to direct the next *Trek* film. (God, I hope NOT.) Didn't anyone see *Thunderbirds*? Apparently not. It was only in the theatres for about 20 minutes and apparently stunk up the place. *Come on, Paramount. Is that the best you can do?*

"He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse's health, a boy's love or a whore's oath." ■

Officer Peter Chewning



COMING EVENTS

OCTOBER

October 23 It would be a scary thing to miss the October meeting! Join us at the Whites' house in Laurel, Maryland. Check out the insert that is included with this newsletter for directions!

NOVEMBER

November 20 Be thankful that it's time for the November club meeting! There will be more information next month in this space!

DECEMBER

December 18 It's time for our most popular event of the year! Don't miss our annual holiday party, including our gift exchange. Look for specifics in the next few months.

JANUARY

January 22 Let's kick off the new year right by getting together for the first meeting of 2005.

FEBRUARY

February 26 Happy 14th birthday, U.S.S. *Chesapeake*! We'll celebrate at our February club meeting!

HOLODICTATION: "A keyboard ... how quaint!"

Sometimes, we as a people advance the technology so fast that we cannot catch up with ourselves.

Case in point: My three-year-old cell phone is doing things that would make the strongest of Ferengi start pulling on his lobes. The *#@#&^ thing will be alright and then, for some unknown reason, the thing will either

turn off or turn off and then turn back on by itself. Now, that's the only the beginning.

I've been on a crusade to fix the problem. I stopped by the local store (in Martinsburg, West Virginia). They don't handle that type of phone. You have to go to a bigger store. Okay.

In the meantime, I call the carrier. Oh, they can fix the problem with a new phone and

extending the contract for two more years. Nooo, that's not the option I wanted to hear.

I stop at a bigger store in Rockville, Maryland. Do they have what I need? No, same as the carrier: brand new system and a three-year contract.

Now, after I leave the store to come home, I think that I want a communicator badge and

a phaser: the communicator badge so I can just tap it and talk to Sue, Mom, Dad or whoever I want to; and the phaser so I can evaporate all of these cell phones.

Don't get me wrong. Technology has and will make our lives better and let us live longer and healthier lives. But what good is having a shuttlecraft if you don't know how to open the hatch?

I think we should turn away from the "throwaway society" we've become. It started with the paper bag, and who knows where it will end?

Sue says I keep things way too long, but I have a wind-up clock that keeps on working whether the power is on or not, and I have some of the board games I got when I was a kid that don't need electricity. I'm even thinking about getting a windmill to generate some electricity.

In this confusion that is my life, I remember the words of Commander Montgomery Scott: "Damage control is easy. Reading Klingon, that's hard."

I'll be standing in line, waiting for my iceberg.

Peace through superior firepower. ■

Weapons Officer Patrick McBee



The first cell phone?