



COMSTAR

Newsletter of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club
December, 2004

Celebrate the season at our annual holiday party

Be sure to come and celebrate the season with the crew of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club on Saturday night, December 18, for one of our most popular and enjoyable events of the entire year!

The meeting will be at the Potomac, Maryland, home of Chief Operations Officer Ann Harding.

We'll kick off the festivities with our dinner at 5:00 p.m., which has again been coordinated this year 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.

At 7:00 p.m., we'll start our monthly

business meeting, which will include the latest updates on club member activities (including 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.

Then, once the business part 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 \$25. Chief of Security Wayne Hall will manage this annual event.

Let's have fun while we share the holiday spirit! ■

Space station crew gets Starfleet award

The two-man crew that recently returned from the International Space Station after six months in orbit got a special award from the future—a replica of the Starfleet emblem as seen recently in *Star Trek: Enterprise*.

Mike Fincke, NASA astronaut, and Gennady Padalka, Russian cosmonaut, received the trophy during a recent visit to Mission Control in Houston. Fincke

and Padalka returned to Earth on October 23 after 188 days on the space station for the Expedition 9 mission. On November 16, they came by NASA's Johnson Space Center to thank the flight control team. In turn, members of the ground crew arranged for Fincke and Padalka to be presented with a replica of the Starfleet Command emblem. ■

CAPTAIN'S LOG: New voyages of Classic *Trek*—3

Thus far in our exploration of fan-made films set during the time of the original *Star Trek* TV show, we've focused on one group's efforts to produce "new voyages" of Captain Kirk and the *U.S.S. Enterprise*.

But haven't you ever wondered if other starships had great adventures those days in the final frontier, too? If so, you'll be interested in the online tales of *Starship Exeter*.

The *Exeter* project was born on Christmas Day in 1995, when fans and brothers Jimm and Josh Johnson decided to use the technology they had available and make their own episode of *Star Trek*.

Though this fan series doesn't deal with the crew of the NCC-1701, it's still deeply rooted in the *Trek* universe. The starship lost its crew in connection with the struggle between the Yangs and the Kohms on planet Omega IV during the second-season Classic *Trek* episode "The Omega Glory."

Since then, the vessel has gained a new crew under Captain John Quincy Garrovick (Any similarity in name to James Tiberius Kirk is purely coincidental ... *not!*), who's played by James Culhane (brother Jimm). Also, the new captain is the nephew of Ensign Stephen Garrovick, who helped Kirk battle the blood-sucking cloud critter in "Obsession."

In the grand *Trek* tradition, every crew must have an alien to provide an outsider's point of view on things. Aboard the *Exeter*, this function is performed by Communications Officer B'Fuselek, an Andorian lieutenant played by Joshua Caleb (brother Josh, who's a big fan of the blue-skinned aliens).

Other members of the crew include the captain's best friend, Chief of Security Paul Cutty (That last name remind anyone of a certain Scottish engineer?) played by Michael Buford, and First Officer Jo Harris, who's portrayed by Holly Guess.

The first adventure of the *Exeter* is entitled "The Savage Empire." After another starship is infected by a deadly disease, Garrovick and company are sent to the Andorian home world to obtain the rare cure, only to become embroiled in a civil war with sinister origins.

(I don't want to give away TOO much of the story, but let's just say that one of the

characters is named Chang, and he just happens to lose an eye during the episode.)

Producing "The Savage Empire" was a years-long labor of love (there's that phrase again) for the Johnsons and their friends, who had to learn how to do everything from applying Andorian makeup and antennae to generating their own special effects of phaser fire and vessels in space.

Uppermost in their minds was maintaining the look and feel of 1960s *Trek*, so they went so far as to sew their own costumes and build their own sets. The only short cut they took was in getting such props as phasers, communicators and tricorders. For these, they went out and purchased authentic Playmates originals!

And their efforts certainly paid off. When "Empire" was first made available for upload in March of 2003, their site on the World Wide Web was deluged with more than 10,000 hits an hour! Needless to say, this traffic crashed their first server, but a fan of the project helped the Johnsons find another site that could handle the enormous interest in their work.

So is *Starship Exeter* worth the ride? To quote another *Trek* captain, "It was fun!" "Empire" is loaded with nostalgia for the original series. It has its highlights, such as a fist fight between Garrovick and a certain Klingon, and its low points, including an encounter with a rather cheesy-looking Andorian dinosaur.

However, the Johnsons do a pretty good job as captain and Andorian, and it says something positive about your project if what folks are concentrating on is the acting! Still, I would have enjoyed seeing more of Cutty and the female first officer along the way.

And I just might get my wish. "Empire" was so successful that *Starship Exeter* is boldly going into a new adventure called "The Tressaurian Intersection." And this time around, there's a local connection as Dennis Russell Bailey (who wrote for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) is adding his scripting prowess to the new voyage. It's due out sometime in the next few months.

And if you want to join the fun, just transport your way on the Web to <http://www.starshipexeter.com> to get in on the action! ■

Captain Randy Hall



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"*Star Trek*,"
"*Star Trek: The Next
Generation*," "*Star
Trek: Deep Space
Nine*," "*Star Trek:
Voyager*," and "*Star
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SCIENCE TREK: And the last shall be first

If you're looking for January's column, you're a month early. But while you're here, go ahead and read December's—Fifth of Five on Data and the Laws of Robotics™. Doesn't that just sound the headlines from a 1980s "Battle of the Bands?"

Anywho, here we are, looking at the last Law of Robotics Isaac Asimov wrote, which ironically is placed before the First Law. (A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.) What could possibly precede this, asks the naïve reader?

Well, imagine two people in equal peril. Which one does the robot save if rescue of each is equally likely? Enough to drive a Law-abiding robot bonkers.

Years after devising the Laws, Asimov pondered a similar question and came up with the Zeroth Law.

Zeroth Law: A robot may not injure humanity or, through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

Which brings up an obvious point: What does it mean for humanity to be injured or come to harm? At a simple level, in our present day and time, it would mean sustain the Earth as a thriving ecosystem, but in the 24th century?

Aside: Taking a liberal view of the Laws—that a non-physical artificial intelligence is also subject to the Laws—I think there's an excellent *Voyager* episode that deals with the question of who to save.

In "Latent Image," the Doctor nearly suffers a mental breakdown from having to choose between saving two crewmembers and decides based on friendship, rather than some rational algorithm. I can imagine an old country doctor saying, "That's what makes us human."

Back to the point of this series: Does Data abide by the Laws? (I don't mean by choice, but rather, is he programmed to follow them?) Let's take one last look at Data's actions in an episode.

In "Data's Day," Vulcan Ambassador T'Pol asks Data to reveal secret information. Data refuses because he is not authorized to reveal such information.

Now, putting aside the fact that T'Pol is not human, Data is clearly not following the Second Law, which means he has decided

that the First or Zeroth take precedence. Is someone (a specific individual) likely to come to harm if Data reveals the information?

There's no specific threat implied at the time. How about "humanity?" If such information is classified, there must be a logical reason (or so Data would think). Thus, revealing it against his previous orders (his authorization to disclose the information) would violate the Zeroth Law.

The gist of this mini-series was to look at the Three (Four) Laws one at a time and examine Data's actions in light of them. Despite the example from "Data's Day," I think our previous examples show that Data does *not* strictly follow Asimov's Laws of Robotics.

After this brief review of a few episodes, I agree with a point in the Asimov FAQ. That is: Data *is* an "Asimovian" robot because he *does* have an in-built ethical system. He does *not* have the Three Laws, however. The example given is the one we looked at in the column on the Second Law ("The Measure of a Man").

One Final Point

In September's column, I talked about how a robot interprets a Law can depend on how that Law was programmed. An interesting question (for those in the club knowledgeable about such things) is how the Four Laws are actually programmed into the robot (that is, what the code actually says, not the English version written out for us humans).

For instance, Asimov's detective Elijah Baley wonders in one novel if the First Law is not better written as "A robot may do nothing that, to its knowledge, will harm a human being; nor, through inaction, knowingly allow a human being to come to harm."

Next month, the Negative First Law. Just kidding. Or so I'll leave you to think. ■

Web Notes:

- <http://members.tripod.com/TerminusCity/robots/robotlaws.html> (As if you need more proof of the connection between the Laws and *Trek*—just make sure you have the volume turned up);
- <http://startrek.epguides.info/?ID=259> (Not just anyone's day); and
- http://www.asimovonline.com/asimov_FAQ.html (Not just anyone's FAQ).

Second Officer Phil Margolies



Data gets a lesson on how to dance from Doctor Crusher as part of *TNG*'s "Data's Day."

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REFLECTIONS: A sci-fi uprising

In the beginning, the Great Bird of the Galaxy, weary of seeing science fiction on television portrayed as juvenile and silly, sought to rectify this most blatant of tragedies with a show that would reflect the awe, intelligence and majesty of the genre.

He envisioned a TV series replete with spaceships and futuristic weaponry, but with a more mature philosophy and aimed at a more adult and contemplative audience. In doing so, Gene Roddenberry not only changed television, but the entire world's perception of science fiction in general.

He called it *Star Trek*, and it was good.

And it came to pass, as the years went by, that this television series would become the template that all other genre TV shows would be measured by.

Some thought this was a good thing. *Star Trek* was popular. It was so successful that even non-genre fans, a.k.a. mundanes, were familiar with it and would be known to utter, albeit unconsciously, its many catch phrases and sayings. This show became so much of an icon in its field that it became a genuine slice of Americana, and its popularity spread worldwide, something every artistic creator, visual or literate, hopes for.

Not everyone was pleased with the attention and adulation the show received. There were those who hated the fact that this show became the world's view of good science fiction.

I can agree with that to a certain extent. *Star Trek* was good science fiction, but it wasn't great science fiction. It was, on the other hand, GREAT drama. This is the reason it became mainstream. Most people are not scientists. They do not like a dilemma, especially in their entertainment. *Star Trek* managed to give you both but disguise some of it by presenting the dilemma in a humanistic setting, relying on character instead of science.

There are three types of *Star Trek* haters. The Purists are the pseudo-intellectual science-fiction fans who refuse to call anything not from a literary origin science fiction. I hate talking to these people. A true person of science has to have an open mind, and I have yet to meet or even talk to a Purist who wasn't suffering from an acute bout of "tunnel vision."

Purists hate the show because of its popularity. They say that *Trek* is watered-down

science fiction at best, which I don't dispute.

But Purists have a difficult time understanding that a story is much more interesting when it's about people and not some scientific theory or event. Purists also have a difficult time understanding that not everyone likes the same things they like.

Then there are the genre fans who feel repulsed by anything that uses actual science and scientific theories. I call these fans Moderates.

Their taste runs more toward fantasy and the creation of civilizations to live out these fantasies. These civilizations are created for no other reason than to make their characters behave the way they think real people should. They can't be bothered with such trifles as innovation and logic, since they only get in the way of the event they want to convey.

I use the word "event" because it's hard to call some of this stuff "stories" since they usually contain a beginning and somewhat of an ending, but the middle is very intangible, and many pages pass by where nothing really happens. The Moderates are the main proponents of the term "speculative fiction" instead of science fiction. They find that the word "fantasy" is a not very well respected, and as I stated, there is NO science in their stuff. Genre writer Harlan Ellison calls this "sci-fi."

The third group is the Warsies. These are the people who became introduced to the genre via the *Star Wars* films and have a hard time believing there was science fiction before *Star Wars*.

Even though their films were considered blockbusters and also part of Americana, they never received respect among the literary and literate world of the science-fiction critic. For this, Warsies blame *Star Trek* and everything *Trek* that came after it.

So, as life would have it, every time a new genre show came along, it was invariably compared to *Star Trek*. Some folks welcome this, but some consider it an insult. Some consider it an obstacle, outdated and past its prime.

Such a man was J. Michael Straczynski, and his weapon of choice was a genre show called *Babylon 5*. As I review this series, you'll understand why I first put you through this long commentary. I'm preparing you for what's to come.

Next month: The battle begins. ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard



RANTINGS: Adventures of Superman

Depending on your age, race, background, political ideology, etc., the 1950s are either remembered fondly or as a time of great persecution of anyone different.

The House Un-American Activities and Sen. Joe McCarthy were finding Communists everywhere they looked; unrest and revolution were brewing that would explode in the next decade. But in the early '50s, none of those things had happened yet. Conformity, security and patriotism were the orders of the day. (Gee, does that sound a bit TOO familiar?)

In 1951, producers were casting a Superman film. They had wanted Kirk Alyn to reprise his role from the serials, but he evidently wanted too much money. (Imagine that.)

George Keefer Besolo had made his way to Hollywood from Woodstock, Iowa. In 1939, he landed the part of Stuart Tarlton in a little picture called *Gone With the Wind* under the name of George Reeves. Over the next several years, he went on to act in films of varying degrees of quality, a few serials and a bunch of forgettable westerns.

George Reeves was cast in *Superman and the Mole Men* as Superman/Clark Kent. When the movie opened, it was really popular and spawned a new TV series. *The Adventures of Superman* appeared on syndicated stations in 1953 for 26 episodes with Phyllis Coates as Lois Lane. It was an immediate hit.

Reeves had success, acclaim and steady employment for the first time in his career. He landed a few film roles, such as in *From Here to Eternity*. It was supposed to be an important role in the film, but most of his part ended up on the cutting room floor.

The series went back into production, but Phyllis Coates was not available. Noel Neill was brought in to recreate the role she originated in the serials.

In 1954, the United States Senate held Juvenile Delinquency subcommittee hearings chaired by Sen. C. Estes Kefauver (D-Tenn.) to investigate the comic book industry after Dr. Frederick Wertham wrote a book attacking comic books called *Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham pointed to Superman, saying "that the comic books aroused in children phantasies [sic] of sadistic joy in seeing other people punished over and over again while you yourself remain immune," terming it the "Superman complex."

There were heated exchanges between committee members and the comic book industry, ending in a virtual shouting match between Sen. Kefauver and William Gaines over severed heads on the covers of EC horror comics. The entire attack on comic books was a case of people blaming the media for something parents were UNWILLING to take responsibility for themselves.

Rather than be censored by the government, the comic book industry set up a self-regulating board called the Comics Code Authority. Comic books became heavily regulated, and nothing controversial could be displayed. So Superman basically became the ultimate Boy Scout in the comics.

Back on TV, the series declined in both writing and production values over the years. Reeves wanted to quit and re-start his film career. He was aging and felt time was running out for him. He also believed that he'd become so typecast he couldn't get any work except in crappy westerns. The only bright spot for him in 1956 was an appearance in a famous episode of *I Love Lucy* as Superman.

Still popular, a new season of the show was ordered for 1957. As a condition of his return, Reeves worked out a deal where he could be more active in production, including directing the show. He directed the final three episodes for the series, and it was cancelled.

Not much is known of Reeves' activities from 1957 to the night of June 16, 1959, when he was found dead at home. There were stories of an affair with a mobster's girlfriend, a producer's wife who was keeping him, etc.

Many questions have arisen about how and why George Reeves died. Was he murdered? Did he commit suicide? Was he despondent over being typecast? The sickest and grizzliest rumor was that he actually believed he was Superman and was killed when he asked a friend to shoot him so a bullet would bounce off his chest.

His death was officially ruled a suicide. An entire cottage industry of conspiracy theories has arisen surrounding it. But to a generation, he was and shall always be Superman.

And on that note, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

*How poor are they that have not patience!
What wound did ever heal but by degrees?* ■

Officer Peter Chewning



George Reeves as Superman

COMING EVENTS

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 directions in the insert that is included with this month's issue of our newsletter, *COMSTAR*.

JANUARY

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

FEBRUARY

February 11-13 Farpoint 2005 at the Marriott Hunt Valley Inn in Hunt Valley, Maryland. Guests will include Jeffrey Combs (Shran on *Enterprise*, Weyoun on *DS9*), Tony Amendola (Bra'tac on *SG-1*), Wayne Pygram (Scorpius on *Farscape*) and David Franklin (Captain Braca on *Farscape*). For more information, check out their website at <http://www.farpointcon.com>.

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

MARCH

March 19 Let's gather for our March meeting. More information soon!

APRIL

April 23 Now that the taxes are paid, let's have our April get-together!

HOLODICTATION: How will we be measured?

This year has been really hard on me and my family, what with surgery, school and the election. I started thinking of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "The Measure of a Man."

This is one of my favorite episodes, and I feel it has many messages I can use throughout my life, but I really started thinking of how we'll be measured when my daughter said it was "politically incorrect" for me to wish someone a "Merry Christmas" and that someone was taken to court over that phrase.

This upset me greatly, to say the least.

By now, you know that I am probably one of the most "politically incorrect" people you know, and I'm proud of it. Who cares what you call a deaf person? The fact of the matter is that individual still cannot hear. Don't get me wrong; I have the utmost respect for anyone who has overcome a disability. Sometimes, I wish my disabilities were as obvious

so I could challenge them and become a better person.

What does it say of our society when, in this episode, Data has to prove that he's more than metal and processors? Shouldn't we be judged more than we are? Where's all the enlightenment we're supposed to have? Where are all the great strides in intelligence? Where's the beef? (Sorry.)

How come it's okay for us (as a people) to be able to "flip off" another driver who cut us off and call him every name in the book, but it's not okay for us to wish someone a Merry Christmas? It's not like I'm trying to convert anyone from his or her form of worship, nor do I want that person to convert me. I just want someone to have a nice Christmas holiday.

I will not let some extremist ruin a nice celebration and some well-deserved relaxation, so I wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year.

Pieces. ■

Weapons Officer Patrick McBee



Lieutenant Commander Data