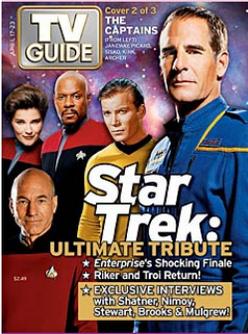


COMSTAR

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

April, 2005



TV Guide ran four special covers, including the “captains” version pictured above, on Thursday, April 14, as a tribute to the upcoming final episode of *Star Trek: Enterprise*.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Art Credits	3
Captain's Log	2
Club Members	
Insert front	
Coming Events	6
Directions to Meeting	
Insert front	
Holodictation	6
Meeting Minutes	
Insert back	
Rantings	5
Reflections	4
Science Trek	3

Paramount's decision to cancel *Enterprise* final, states official

While *Trek United*, an organization of fans of *Star Trek: Enterprise*, has been working on keeping the show alive, a recent letter sent by John Wentworth, executive vice president, marketing and media relations, Paramount Television, to Tim Brazeal, founder and campaign leader for *SaveEnterprise.com*, states that any further efforts to save the show will not bring it back for a fifth season.

“Dear Mr. Brazeal,

“Paramount Network Television and the producers of *Star Trek: Enterprise* are very flattered and impressed by the fans' passionate outpouring of attention for the show and their efforts to raise funds to continue the show's production.

“We share your love for the series and the entire *Star Trek* franchise, which the studio has fostered and developed over four decades. However, the recent decision to conclude the show's run on UPN is final.

“We can not and will not be able to accept funds from viewers to produce *Star Trek: Enterprise* or any other series.

“Paramount Network Television is extremely proud of *Star Trek: Enterprise* and the accomplishments of its actors and producers and the entire crew, but we must bid farewell to the show. We believe the franchise is still very vital as evidenced by the fans' demand

for books, DVDs and all sorts of related merchandise.

“We are grateful for the fans' rich history of unwavering enthusiasm for all things *Trek*, and we hope they'll join us in looking forward to the next chapter of this enduring series in the future.

“Sincerely,

“John Wentworth”

On April 14, the cast and crew for the show held a wrap party for *Enterprise*.

Held at the historic Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, the party served as both a celebration and a way to say goodbye for the people who worked on the show for the last four years.

“I've had a great time,” said Scott Bakula, who plays Captain Jonathan Archer. “I felt like we did some great shows. We had four great seasons, and I know we got better every year. I'm proud of the work we've done. You know, I'm sad to say goodbye to everybody, all these great, talented people, but we had a ball together.” Except for a benefit stage performance on May 20, Bakula has nothing specific on the horizon, acting-wise. “Not doing anything right now. I'm just trying to finish the remodel of my house!”

The series finale for *Star Trek: Enterprise* will air on Friday, May 13, and will be called “These Are the Voyages.” ■

April club meeting to be held at Hard Times Cafe

Now that the taxes have been paid, let's get together for the April meeting.

The next meeting of the U.S.S. Chesapeake *Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, April 23, at the College Park, Maryland, Hard Times Café.

We'll gather at 5 p.m. to order our dinner that evening.

At 7 p.m., we'll begin our monthly club meeting, which will include discussion of upcoming conventions (including Shore Leave), find out what fellow club members are up to and get the latest *Star Trek* and other science-fiction news.

Check out the insert with this newsletter for directions. ■

CAPTAIN'S LOG: The Klingons' tall ship

Last month, I talked about my favorite ship in *Star Trek*, the “movie” *Enterprise*. This time around, I’m giving equal time to the “bad guys” by focusing on my second-favorite starship, the Klingon Battle Cruiser.

For the first two years of the original show, its most popular alien enemies didn’t have a ship of their own.

Oh, we knew they had vessels because the Klingons kept showing up on different planets. But their starships were always “out of visual range” or just a little dot on the *Enterprise* viewscreen.

Even your average Romulan crew had a Bird of Prey, though I was never wild about its design. Sure, the shape was interesting, but the orange bird on the bottom always looked too much like an Earth creature for my liking.

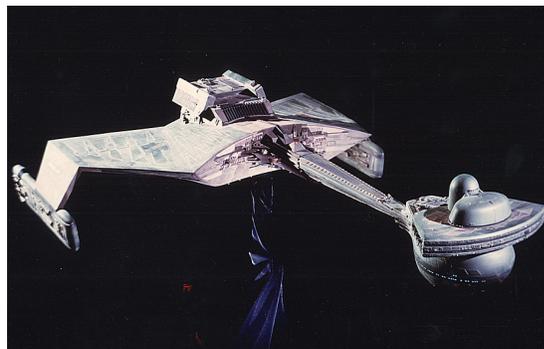
When *Trek* entered its third season, the producers were able to spend the money to give the Klingons their own starship. And what a ship it was! From the “cobra head” in front to the “bat wings” in back, this was a vessel worthy of the race that would eventually replace Martians as the evil aliens in the American lexicon.

However, the first time we actually saw the Klingon vessels, they were being used by ... the Romulans! As the saying goes: *Huh?*

As work got underway on “The Enterprise Incident,” it came time to do the special effects shots. The prop man was sent to get the model of the Bird of Prey out of storage so multiple shots could be taken to make it look like our heroes were surrounded.

Then, something happened that would forever alter the history of the *Star Trek* universe. The prop guy dropped the Bird of Prey and broke it!

The only ship they had was the newly created Klingon Battle Cruiser, but the story called for Romulans, so what to do? In a



pinch, the producers came up with a new treaty between *Trek*'s main baddies that allowed them to share technology, and the episode was produced with only a few lines of dialogue to explain the situation.

Since I didn’t get into *Star Trek* until it hit syndication several years later, I knew none of this when I saw “Incident” for the first time. Unaware of the budget restrictions the show had faced, I wondered: “Why didn’t they just say the Romulans had new ships?”

Of course, I’m glad that little detour didn’t prevent the Klingons from getting their magnificent starship. In fact, when I visited the National Air and Space Museum in D.C. after they put the original *Enterprise* model on display in the mid-1970s, I happily bought a poster of the Battle Cruiser in the museum gift shop, the first image of that ship I’d ever seen.

Time passed, and a quirk of fate reversed the behind-the-scenes situation of “Incident” when the script for *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* got leaked from the studio. As a result, the producers changed the film’s villains from the Romulans to the Klingons, though the turtle-headed ones did end up using the upgraded Birds of Prey designed for their pointy-eared allies.

But along came a little thing called *The Next Generation*, and just as there was a new *Enterprise*, there was also a new ship for the Klingons.

The great warrior race went from using a sleek, menacing vessel to a generic ship with a tuning fork up front! Putting it bluntly, I was absolutely horrified.

To be honest, I never thought much of most of the ships in *The Next Generation*. The *Enterprise D* looked to me like a big space-faring frog, and the only ones to come out ahead in the transition to a new century were the Romulans, who got a nifty green ship that looks terrific on a Christmas tree!

Still, the Battle Cruisers have continued to show up in stories set in the time of the first show, as well as “The Way of the Warrior” in *Deep Space Nine*, so I guess I can’t complain ... much.

Next time, I want to discuss my third-favorite ship, the one that has the “defiant” design. ■

Captain Randy Hall

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Check out our club
website: www.usschesapeake.org

The opinions
expressed in this
newsletter do not
necessarily represent
those of the
entire club.

“*Star Trek*,”
“*Star Trek: The Next
Generation*,” “*Star
Trek: Deep Space
Nine*,” “*Star Trek:
Voyager*,” and “*Star
Trek: Enterprise*,”
as well as the terms
“starship” and
“starship *Enterprise*,”
are registered
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infringement on
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SCIENCE *TREK*: Collect call to Alpha Centauri

Speaking of communications, if this ^#*\$^@#* DSL quits working on me one more time, I'm going back to dial-up. It was a darn sight faster and more reliable.

So, where were we? Ah yes, interstellar communications, or how to talk to your neighbor when he/she/it is 4.3 billion trillion miles away. Verizon might have a large cellular network, but I doubt they'll have towers on Alpha Centauri in 300 years. (Confidential to Verizon: Meet the challenge!)

So how are we going to talk? Last month, we discussed a couple of wavelengths we're looking at to see if ET is talking to us. First, there were the optical wavelengths (that's light we can see) and the "cosmic watering hole," also known as the microwave 21-centimeter line. In the world of reality, communicating across stellar distances is up against several challenges:

Distance

From me to Patrick is about 100 miles. (I call him, and we talk "real time") From me to the moon is about 250,000 miles. (I call up Neil Armstrong, and there's a six-second pause between my words and his response—three seconds each way). From me to the Mars Rovers averages about 80,000,000 miles. (That's about 15 or so minutes each way at the speed of light.) From me to Proxima Centauri is about 25,000,000,000,000 miles. (That's about four years, 87 days, 14 hours and 24 minutes. Each way).

Power

The lights from those lasers people are zapping into pilots' eyes are traveling a couple of miles at the most. Shine it into the night sky, though, and you wouldn't come

close to blinding the pilot of the space shuttle (once it's back in flight, that is).

Math Alert! Signal Strength = Square Root of (30 * Transmitted Power) / Distance. That is, the signal strength increases relative to the power of the transmitter and decreases relative to the distance.

In real terms, the signals coming back from the Pioneer and Voyager craft (which our deep space antennas on Earth can still detect) have power amounting to less than 1/100th of a 60-watt light bulb. And that's just to Pioneer 10 and the Voyagers, which are about 11,000,000,000 miles out.

Aside: As the transmitting power decreases and the distance increases, the signal strength diminishes, of course. Then, we start running into signal-to-noise ratio considerations. That is, it's hard to distinguish the data signal from the background noise. Next time you're at a *Chesapeake* meeting in a crowded place (say the Hard Times Café), see how well you can hear someone quiet like Abby from across the room.

Dust and gas

Last month, we talked about the reason the cosmic watering hole is so popular. Aside from being a basic wavelength—that of emissions caused by hydrogen atoms (no, not that kind of emissions), most dust and gas in space does not absorb radiation of this wavelength.

Ever see a picture of a nebula with a big dark spot in it? That's because the dust is absorbing all the radiation behind it. Not too helpful if you have to communicate through the cloud.

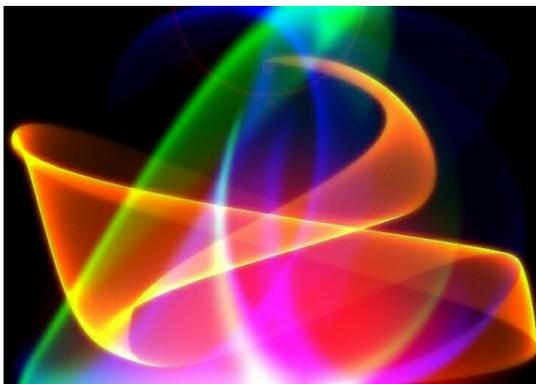
So how does science fiction solve these problems?

The answers, next month! ■

Web Notes:

- http://www.coseti.org/ejasa_02.htm (Can you see?);
- http://www.coseti.org/morris_0.htm (The search is on.);
- <http://www.seti.org.au/spacecom/quantumcom.html> (At least we got a plan.);
- <http://www.marsinstitute.info/epo/merfacts.html> (Them perky rovers);
- <http://www.solstation.com/stars/alp-cent3>.

continued on page 6



ART CREDITS:
startrek.com 1, 6
desktopstarships.com 2
images.google.com
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amazon.com 5
Dynamic Graphics
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REFLECTIONS: Anatomy of a scriptwriter

I own about 50 books on scriptwriting. I've been collecting them for about 20 years now. I've read hundreds of books on writing scripts, but I didn't keep the books that I didn't believe would help me. Of course, some of the books I've thrown or given away, I now wish I had kept, such as Syd Fields' first book on the subject. Such is life.

When it comes to the art of writing scripts, every book—and I mean every single one of them—is in complete agreement on certain rules concerning the application of this craft. When it's done in an average manner, it's a craft, when it's done well, it's an art form. There are certain rules regarding the CORRECT way to assemble a working, sellable teleplay.

To those who actually adhere to that nonsense of "There are no rules," you have my deepest sympathies when you actually try to apply that philosophy to life. EVERYTHING has rules. There IS a right way and a wrong way to do almost any and every thing, and at the risk of bursting bubbles, I simply must make this declaration. The world is NOT existential. There are truths and fallacies that exist outside of existentialism. Making that distinction makes life easier.

There are certain do's and don'ts when it comes to writing, and I can assure you that if you purposely ignore these rules, your beloved script will find its way to the producer's trash can. I mention these things because in doing *Babylon 5*, J. Michael Straczynski always managed to not only break said rules, but do it in a very amateurish and insipid fashion.

It's not that Mr. Straczynski is unaware of these rules, since he has written a very good book on scriptwriting, one I recommend to anyone wanting to pursue the field. In this book, he names those very restrictions and cautions the reader to avoid breaking them, but when it suited HIM, he broke them at every turn.

Where do I begin? Let's start with his biggest failing, the thing that really frosted my oats (I got that from Andy Robinson): dialogue. There are three "no-nos" in writing dialogue. No-no number one: exposition. Film and video are visual mediums, and the number one rule is: You don't say it, you show it. I actually heard a character in one of his *B5* films say: "What happened was self

explanatory, so let me explain it."

You explain the actions on the screen by the ACTIONS of the characters. It's not easy, and it shouldn't be. A producer friend of mine once read a script by this supposed hot-shot young writer. I asked him later how it was. He said: "It was horrible! All his characters said exactly what was on their minds!" In the industry, this is called "on the nose" writing. It's bad writing, and *Babylon 5* oozed with it.

On page 160, under the title "Screenwriting tips" in *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*, Straczynski says: "Avoid long, tedious monologues. An unbroken speech that runs as a page or more can slow the pace of your screenplay to a tortuous crawl."

The wild thing about this is that almost EVERY character on *Babylon 5* made long, tedious monologues. This was one of the things that drove me mad when watching it.

In defense of Straczynski, in seasons 3, 4 and 5, he was writing each and every script, and clever dialogue takes time. Long speeches take up a lot of page space and therefore take up a lot of time. This means less actual writing to do and allows you to use less plotting, which also takes time to conceive.

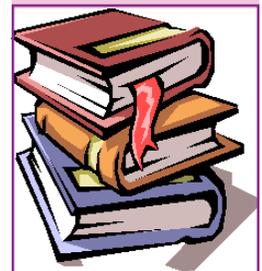
Since he was working from a big outline, all Straczynski had time to do was fill in the plot points (which he had already written in the outline) and pad the rest with needless exposition and monologues. There was no time to try to figure out a clever way to show it and not say it. There was no time to think of a metaphor that best illustrated the point he wanted to make. There was no time for short, crisp dialogue to advance the story.

That's what I believe to be the problem he had in the last three seasons of his show: He didn't have the luxury of time. That does NOT explain these bouts of bad writing showing up in the first two seasons, unfortunately.

In an episode of *Jeremiah*, a woman—the main antagonist of the story—was off on a rant worthy of Peter Dinklage, but unlike with Peter, I had no idea she was getting at. I thought to myself, "Is there a point to this little speech?" And at that moment, one of the other characters asked her: "Is there a point to this little speech?" I felt vindicated. That character was as bored as I was.

Next month: Anatomy, part 2. ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard



RANTINGS: An extra large pizza with a side of wings

Soon after the cancellation of *Star Trek: Enterprise*, the announcements came that all four seasons of the show would be released on DVD by the end of this year and that the *Star Trek: Insurrection* Special Collector's Edition DVD will be released in June.

Paramount executroids are rushing all the *Star Trek* product they have into release so they "will NEVER have to deal with a bunch of losers (like *Star Trek* fans) ever again." We do not represent a substantial, desirable demographic in their estimation—at least, not enough of one to continue to spend good production money and time on. Yet, they still want us to spend OUR money on them.

Now that the media frenzy that was "Schivopalooza" is over, our subject *du jour* is the *Star Trek: First Contact* SCE DVD. *First Contact* was the last GOOD *Star Trek* movie and the ONLY good film Jonathan Frakes has directed. I was pleasantly surprised at how good this was (better than I remembered it, and I liked it then).

On Disc 1, along with a great video transfer of the feature film, is the usual text commentary by Michael and Denise Okuda, along with audio commentary by Frakes and screenwriters Ronald D. Moore and Brannon Braga (as IF you hadn't had enough of him already). Disc 2 contains mini-documentaries on such topics as film production and life beyond our galaxy. In the section on "The *Star Trek* Universe" are boilerplate programs like "The Legacy of Zefram Cochrane" and "First Contact: The Possibilities"—nothing new in either of these.

The most interesting program in this section was "Jerry Goldsmith: A Tribute," a long-overdue salute to a key player in the production of *Trek* movies and series going back to the 1970s and an exploration of the role of composer in film production.

"The Borg Collective" is an exploration of the development of the Borg from their first appearance on *TNG* to Seven of Breasteses and beyond, with titles of "Unimatrix One," "The Queen" and "Design Matrix." I can sum all these programs up in one word: Yawn.

For the most part, the same can be said for the "First Contact Production" section. "The Story," "The Deflector Dish," "Making First

Contact" and "The Art of First Contact" are standard stuff, and there's nothing exciting in any of them unless you're a TOTAL production geek. "The Missile Silo" was an interesting exploration of how the production team turned an abandoned nuclear missile silo in Arizona into the launch bay of the Phoenix.

The most disappointing program was "From 'A' to 'E'." From the title, it sounded like it was a program about the development of the cinematic *U.S.S. Enterprise(s)*. It's NOT. It's about how sections of the *Enterprise* were transformed into a Borg hive for production. (Who cares?)

Mildly interesting are the "Scene Deconstruction" programs on the "Borg Queen Assembly," "Escape Pod Launch" and the "Borg Queen's Demise." "The Archives" containing "Storyboards" and the "Photo Gallery" would be better viewed on a computer. Rounding out the geekcrap disc are the trailers containing the teaser trailer, the theatrical trailer and an ad for Borg 4-D in Vegas.

I was disappointed that there were no deleted scenes in this collection or more interesting stuff, but I guess I shouldn't be surprised, given Paramount's recent demonstrated antipathy towards *Star Trek* fans.

One of my fellow columnists attacked me recently for my "comments about *Enterprise*." I had considered not responding. After all, he's entitled to his opinion. It would be real easy to say it was an unprovoked attack and portray myself as victim of a conspiracy, a ploy on his part to curry the editor's favor, etc. (Just because you're paranoid DOESN'T mean they're not out to get you!)

I chose not to do that and considered my options about how best to respond, so here it is: Which comments are those? He does not even note which ones he objects to, and he says nothing to refute them. I have read through the column in question and can't find anything I wish to retract. *Enterprise* was a mediocre idea that was poorly executed, especially in the first two seasons. It COULD have been so much more, but it wasn't.

And thus I clothe my naked villainy with odd old ends stol'n out of holy writ, and seem a saint, when most I play the devil. ■

Officer Peter Chewning



COMING EVENTS

APRIL

April 23 Now that the taxes are paid, let's have our April get-together! For directions to the Hard Times Café in College Park, Maryland, see the Insert that is included with this newsletter. Be sure to arrive by 5, ready to order your dinner! Remember that we have to leave before 10 p.m.

MAY

May 21 It "may" be time for our next monthly meeting! We'll talk about the *Enterprise* finale, among other things! Tune in next month for more information as it becomes available.

SCIENCE TREK: Collect call to Alpha Centauri (continued)

continued from page 3

- htm* (The Alpha Centauri Three);
- <http://home.online.no/~tobak/research.htm> (Well, will it?);
- <http://homepage.sunrise.ch/homepage/schatzer/Alpha-Centauri.html> (All about Alpha Centauri.);
- <http://homepages.iol.ie/~seanmck/comms.htm> (A little bit of everything on the topic.);
- <http://www.threerivertechreview.com/bovaseti.htm> (A Bova and beyond.);
- <http://www.spacer.com/news/pioneer10-00b.html> (Keep on truckin', Pioneer.);
- <http://www.davidbrin.com/xenology5.html> (Preach it, Dave!);
- <http://www.spacetoday.org/SolSys/DeepSpaceNetwork/DeepSpaceNetwork.html> (The N stands for Network, not nine.);
- <http://www.tsgc.utexas.edu/archive/subsystems/comm.pdf> (This is what I went to school for.); and
- <http://www.lyon.edu/projects/marsbugs/2002/20020909.txt> (That's just wrong.).

Second Officer Phil Margolies

HOLODICTATION: "How Kai's the Winn?"

During the past 30 days, a lot has happened in our lives, and this has shaken the faith of a few of us.

For those of you who don't know, Sue lost the baby and had to have a DNC. We were dealing with that when the Terri Schiavo incident came to the attention of the media and into our homes. We were not over that when Pope John Paul II died and the world seemed to stop for seven days. The past month has been a whirlwind of emotions for all of us, whether you're a Christian or not.

Two out of the three incidents that affected my family and me have polarized the entire population. I won't go into the Schiavo events because they spark heated debates among all of us, but the passing of the Pope is one that has affected the whole world.

I've never seen the entire planet focus its attention on one man. The Pope has always had everyone's attention on whatever he did

and wherever he went. I've known of atheists who would travel hundreds of miles to see the Pope when he visited the United States.

To have 2 billion people view his funeral mass, either in person or via television, is inconceivable.

When Kai Opaka was forced to stay on the planet or she would die, I never understood how Kira felt until this past month. To have one's spiritual leader taken from you leaves a very large hole to be filled. I'm sure everything on Bajor stopped when the news of Opaka reached them. That's why the whole "Circle" incident started. Bajorians were trying to fill the void that the Prophets left.

The world goes on and so do we, sometimes a little wiser and more compassionate. I know that my family is a lot closer (including you all) and that I look at things in a different light. I keep all of you in my thoughts and prayers. ■

"May the Prophets walk with you."

Weapons Officer Patrick McBee



DS9's Kai Opaka