



William Shatner makes science fun in a new documentary.

## Shatner explains *Star Trek* science in new documentary

Who says exploring the science of *Star Trek* has to be dull? Not William Shatner, who will narrate a two-hour documentary on the subject, according to the *Montreal Gazette*.

*The Science of Star Trek*, by Montreal filmmaker Alan Handel, is based on Shatner's book, *I'm Working on That: A Trek from Science Fiction to Science Fact*, which checked to see if any of the show's "far out" ideas have become real since the show debuted in the 1960s.

The documentary features interviews with scientists who were inspired by *Star Trek* as children, then proceeded to bring what they saw as part of the show's vision to life.

Don't expect the show to have a dry or academic tone. "The whole idea is to flesh out his humor and have his humor central to the whole thing," Handel said. "Part of the content and a lot of the flavor he's established in the book in a way that's consistent with Bill Shatner, icon, which is very self-deprecating and funny."

Interacting with the star who played Captain James T. Kirk—is it a daunting task? "He's been really good to deal with," Handel said. "People say very cautiously, 'So what's Shatner like to work with?' But the god's honest truth — he's so professional."

*The Science of Star Trek* will be aired next season on the Discovery Channel in Canada, the History Channel in the United States and Channel 5 in Britain. Discovery Channel International will also air the two-hour documentary on approximately 100 of its channels around the globe.

If Shatner wants to make a sequel on *Trek* and science, he need look no further than talking to scientists at NASA, who will soon install a new voice-activated computer system on the International Space Station that sounds very much like the one on the starship *Enterprise*, according to *trektoday.com*.

Clarissa, as the system is named, can recognize and support 75 orders through a vocabulary of 260 words. The system will respond to commands, read procedure steps aloud and support voice-activated alarms.

This advance can't come soon enough for Michael Fincke, who had a small guest appearance in the recent *Star Trek: Enterprise* finale, "These Are the Voyages ..." "To be able to speak to the system and hear the step-by-step instructions while my hands are free to complete the procedure will be like having another crew member aboard."

The system may first be tested on board the space station this summer by astronaut John Phillips. ■

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## Pool fun and BBQ at the July club meeting

The next meeting of the U.S.S. Chesapeake *Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, July 16, at the Ellicott City, Maryland, home of Officer Justine Randt.

We'll gather at 5 p.m. for a BBQ dinner that evening and fun in the pool. Then, at 7 p.m., we'll hold our monthly club meeting, including discussion of the recent Shore Leave

convention, find out what fellow club members are up to and get the latest news regarding *Star Trek* and other science-fiction TV shows and movies.

Do you need directions to this month's gathering? Then be sure to check out the insert with this issue of COMSTAR for directions. ■

## CAPTAIN'S LOG: The bad new days

While enjoying the holiday weekend with my family, I noticed that one of our favorite topics of conversation was "the good old days." You know, those times of yesteryear when life was simpler and things were easier and stuff like that?

Unfortunately, when it comes to *Star Trek*, these are "the bad new days." No new *Trek* on TV for the first time in two decades and precious little elsewhere as well.

Still, for those of us who remember the dim, distant 1970s, this isn't the first time we haven't been overwhelmed with new *Trek*.

Back when I was in college, I regularly sneaked off on an "errand" while working in the summer so I could catch an episode of the *Trek* animated series on Channel 20 just to see Kirk, Spock and the crew do things they never did in those 79 live-action programs!

And in the late '70s, when they announced *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, the idea of the *Enterprise* crew getting together for a movie with *Star Wars*-level special effects just about blew my mind! The good old days, indeed!

I don't think it'll be long before new *Trek* is gracing the airwaves or reaching our local theaters, but how are we to make it through "the bad new days" until then? Let me make a few recommendations.

If you've got all the DVDs or can catch the Spike TV cable channel, you'll find that good old *Trek* is better than no *Trek* at all. But if you've just got to have shiny new adventures, keep your eyes on the *Star Trek: New Voyages* and *Starship Exeter* sites on the World Wide Web. Those fan-made episodes keep on getting better and better!

For example, a new segment of the latest *Exeter* adventure is being released every other week until the end of August, and the new teaser is already a quantum leap ahead of that crew's first episode. Go to [www.starshipexeter.com](http://www.starshipexeter.com) and check it out!

I couldn't discuss new *Trek* without putting in another plug for the novels from Pocket Books. With *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* already "relaunched" and *Enterprise* soon to follow, you can still enjoy your favorite old characters in brand new stories.

By the way, has anyone else noticed that

these days, the novels are as cool on the outside as they are on the inside? The cover art on the books has improved tremendously, which makes it that much easier to pick them up off the shelves.

While it's true that no new *Trek* is being produced in a comics format, Titan Publishing has apparently had some success with reprinting those crusty, dusty 1960s Gold Key issues in trade paperbacks since they're expanding into some of the best DC runs of Classic *Trek* and *The Next Generation*. These reprints feature some classic material, and if they sell at warp speed, maybe we'll get some new trips through the wormhole!

Art Asylum continues to produce new *Trek* toys. During the past year, they put out two nice sets of action figures from the original series, from new versions of everyone from my favorite starship captain to the ever-sultry Orion slave girl.

Next up from them are seven-inch replicas of Sisko, Dax, O'Brien and Bashir from the classic *DS9* episode, "Trials and Tribble-ations," as well as the Mirror Universe version of the *Enterprise* NX-01.

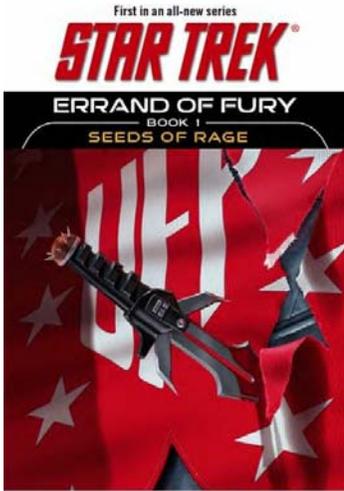
Speaking of starships, I've really been impressed with the sets of miniatures currently being sold under the Johnny Lightning banner. Not only are they expertly produced, but they're inexpensively priced as well. Though not nearly as big as those old Playmates toys, they do come with nice stands to display them on. (I should know. I have a few zooming through the quadrant on my desk at work!)

Last but far from least, the *Star Trek Communicator* magazine continues to grace store shelves on a bi-monthly basis. Since there isn't as much new material for them to discuss, the writers at the *Communicator* have turned more of their attention to the fans lately, and I still enjoy reading about the impact *Trek* has had on other followers of science fiction.

And besides, when there is new *Trek* to talk about, they'll have it covered, right?

I realize this list doesn't include everything, but I hope it's enough to help you get more fun out of "the bad new days" – at least until the new season of Friday shows on the Sci Fi Channel gets here! ■

Captain Randy Hall



KEVIN RYAN

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## SCIENCE TREK: Science by season — VI

Perhaps I'm a bit unusual. No, that's not what I mean. What I'm trying to say is this: I like *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. And I'm not alone in this club.

This movie contains my favorite scene in all of *Trek*, and it's not Persis Khambatta naked in the shower.

Relatively early in the film, Kirk and Scotty approach the refitted *Enterprise*, passing the length of the ship before docking. This was the first time the ship seemed *real* to me. I could believe it was an actual starship sitting in dry dock orbiting the Earth. My disbelief was suspended. What an amazing feeling.

Not only did we get to see such a great view of the outside of the ship, but an incredible number of interiors (whether sets or just visuals) gave a good impression of the vastness and realism of the craft.

### V'Ger

I suppose the place to start is with Voyager 6, the long-lost probe that returned home as V'Ger. Supposedly launched sometime in the 1990s, this probe vanished into a black hole and popped up on the other side of the galaxy. It was found, badly damaged, by a race of living machines that refit it and sent it to meet its maker.

Let's talk negatives first: Ain't likely we'll be sending anymore Voyagers out anytime soon—1 and 2 went out in the mid-'70s, but they were the last deep space probes we sent (unless, like the Eugenics Wars, they were sent out, and we just don't know about it). Second, I can do the speed and distance calculations if you'd like, but believe me when I say these probes don't fly too fast, relatively speaking. And there are no black holes that close to Earth.

Now, let's look on the up side. What an incredibly sophisticated piece of equipment V'Ger became. And that particle cloud, dispersing as it slowed, was quite realistic. I also find it amazing, though well done, that after all Earth had been through, the *Enterprise* had access to NASA's codes for sending commands to a 300-year-old ship. Accepting that the codes survived, I don't find it surprising that Kirk and crew were able to use them—think of the vast computer memory capacity the ship must have.

One of the biggest questions in the *Trek* community a few years after the movie was

whether the machine planet Voyager found was that of the Borg. Unlikely, I think, given the attitude and intentions of the Borg when we first saw them. Unless, of course, V'Ger was really a double agent.

### Naked androids

Let's see, V'Ger scans and then abducts Ilia, the Deltan navigator. Soon after, it returns her. Well, at least a semblance of her: Voyager deposits a fully functional android, a complete electro-mechanical reproduction of Ilia. In record time. If you thought Data was sophisticated with his positronic brain and sickly skin tone, the Ilia probe was beyond Dr. Soong's wildest dreams.

We've mentioned above the *Enterprise's* vast computing power. From what I saw, compared to V'Ger, the *Enterprise* was like an abacus to IBM's BlueGene/L. I just wonder if she followed Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics.

### Uniforms and life belts

I know, I know. You hated the bland uniforms. I'm sure they're not as ugly and uncomfortable for real-life star trekkers as they appear—I could probably write a 22-part series on the evolution of fabrics from now until *DS9*.

What I really wanted to talk about is the belts the characters wore. Like products being developed now for our military, the belts were sensors that monitored the well-being of their wearer and likely transmitted the information to Dr. McCoy and his medical staff.

Sure, it took the suspense out of spending three episodes finding Ensign Expendable who knocked himself out in the shower on double-Z deck, but they were a nice piece of realism and extrapolation.

### Web Notes:

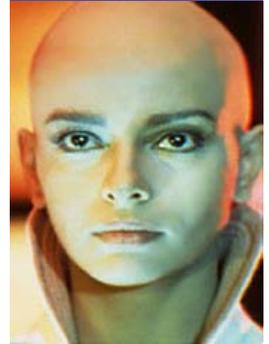
- <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079945/> (the ultimate authority); and
- [http://domino.research.ibm.com/comm/pr.nsf/pages/news.20050622\\_bluegene.html](http://domino.research.ibm.com/comm/pr.nsf/pages/news.20050622_bluegene.html) (and you thought Levi's made blue genes).

### Would you believe

*Deep Space Nine's* Andy Robinson was considered for the part of Decker in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*?

### Last word

If you want to read the only *Trek* book written by its creator, Gene Roddenberry, find yourself a copy of the movie's novelization. ■  
*Second Officer Phil Margolies*



V'Ger uses the Ilia probe to communicate with the *Enterprise* crew.

ART CREDITS:  
[startrek.com](http://startrek.com) 1, 2, 3, 6  
[images.google.com](http://images.google.com)

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[newvoyages.com](http://newvoyages.com)  
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## REFLECTIONS: The Roddenberry complex

“JMS thinks he’s God, which must come as a shock to Harlan Ellison, who KNOWS he’s God.”—Randy Hall

To *Star Trek* fans and the genre-challenged, *Trek* is God. It can do no wrong. Oh, there are fans of each series who hate all things *Trek* except THEIR favorite, but their favorite is usually considered to be perfect. The non-*Trek* fan and the genre-challenged think it’s pristine, so to speak, because it’s the only science fiction they know.

In science fiction, everything invariably is compared to *Star Trek*. Be it film, especially television, even literature—not because of quality, but because of its mass acceptance and familiarity. This type of success has escaped the genre for the most part. I’ll be the first to say this isn’t fair to other shows of the genre, but this isn’t a perfect world. If it was, I’d be king.

“*Star Trek* was a hideous obstacle,” Straczynski complained, “which is why I go ballistic when I hear fans say it made it easier to sell *Babylon 5*, when in fact it was the exact opposite. The spectre of *Star Trek* made it immensely more difficult to sell that show because in America, the paradigm was created that ‘there is only *Star Trek*.’”

“We would bring the material to them, and they would say: ‘Well, there’s already a space show out there, which has a corner on the market.’ We would insist: ‘No, no, there’s room for more than one space show,’ but they would not get it out of their head, and this is a direct quote from most of them: ‘The market will not sustain more than one show like *Star Trek*, period!’”

It was obvious from the very beginning that Straczynski fancied himself as another “great bird of the galaxy,” a creator of a television franchise that would someday spawn spin-offs and motion pictures. He admired the legacy that Roddenberry created and aspired to the same. One might even come to the conclusion that it wasn’t a dream but an obsession.

“I’m relishing my role as the ‘great bird of my own galaxy,’” Straczynski told *Cinefantastique* magazine back in 1994. “It’s a hoot. It’s very strange being in charge. It’s a weird feeling. If you’re in a big production meeting and you make a very small joke, you get a very large laugh—which you know isn’t due to the joke. It’s a six-year-old dream come to fruition.

“If there’s a sequel, which is already written out, that’s my swan song in television.

After the *Babylon 5* story is finished, there is a thread that spins off which could be done if there is interest. Everything I will have wanted to say, I would have said in the course of telling the *Babylon 5* story.”

Of course, his tune has changed somewhat since then. His “thread” was the story of the Rangers, but he did *Crusade* instead because TNT was so disappointed with the fifth season’s ratings that they wanted no mention of or reference to *Babylon 5* in its “sequel,” and the entire premise of *Crusade* was rendered a moot point by *Babylon 5*’s series finale.

If you recall, Sheridan and company got together for dinner 20 years later. Well, in *Crusade*, a plague was released that would kill everyone on Earth in five years ... . I guess we knew how THAT turned out. There was NO suspense for *Crusade* on which to hang its premise. The show was doomed, artistically, from the start.

“Ran into a TNT executive who told me, under promise of confidentiality, that there were two things that led to *Crusade* being cancelled. They had done a survey, and it said that the TNT audience did not like or want or respond to SF. They also discovered that when *B5* came up, the TNT audience left and the *B5* audience came in. When the episode ended, the *B5* audience left and the TNT audience came back, literally, so it had no effect in building the shows that followed it.”

*Crusade* is the only show in the history of television to be cancelled BEFORE it premiered. JMS blamed TNT. The Sci Fi Channel commissioned a TV movie/pilot, *Babylon 5: The Legend of the Rangers*. This was a return to the *B5* universe, so to speak, since he never left it, but he was now allowed to make reference to it. This was supposed to be a triumphant return, but so was *Crusade*.

The movie bombed, as did *Crusade* when TNT finally aired the 13 shows shot. JMS blamed the Sci Fi Channel, the fans blamed the NFL playoffs, and I blame the fans. Every attempt to continue the *B5* story was largely ignored by its fans, a mixture of Purists (who NEVER watched the show, period) and Moderates (see my column from last December), who had no time for the *B5* universe; they just wanted to see the characters from the first show. You can’t build a franchise that way,

*continued on page 6*



The ship used in the JMS show, *Crusade*.

## RANTINGS: Bullets bounce off

The conventional wisdom on Superman movies goes like this: *Superman IV* was such a bomb that Warner Bros. decided the series needed a major overhaul and they've been trying to do it unsuccessfully since 1988.

That's correct, but the truth is never pure and rarely simple. A LOT of details have been omitted, like the fact that no less than six Superman films were attempted between 1988 and 2005. *Superman IV* was originally a 134-minute movie with the Man of Steel fighting two "Nuclear Men." After a disastrous test screening, the film was edited down to 90 minutes.

The footage with the first Nuclear Man was cut, and Cannon had planned to use it as a basis for *Superman V* with Christopher Reeve, who wisely said no. When Cannon's rights to Superman expired, they reverted to the Salkinds, who were going to do *Superman: The New Movie*, starring Gerard Christopher of the *Superboy* TV series. They were unable to commence production before the rights reverted to Warner Bros. Once Warner had the rights to Superman, they would never turn them loose again.

In 1994, development began on *Superman Lives*, which was based on the "Doomsday/Death of Superman" story. Kevin Smith wrote the script. Jon Peters was the producer. You may have heard about this. Nicholas Cage was cast as Superman. As bad as that sounds, it gets worse.

Peters didn't want Superman to fly or wear the usual costume, saying it was "too faggy." Peters also wanted Brainiac to have a "gay R2D2" as a henchman. (Does that seem like a double standard?) Peters insisted Brainiac had to fight polar bears at the Fortress of Solitude and that Superman "had to fight a giant spider in the third act."

The studio told Smith: "This is a corporate movie. The main idea is to sell as much merchandise as possible. It doesn't matter if the film is any good." They had discovered they made more money on merchandising than on the picture. (See, Yogurt *was* right.)

When Tim Burton was brought in to direct, he wanted to go another direction and use "his" writers. Kevin Smith's tenure on this travesty was over, and he should thank his lucky stars. The fan reaction to the casting of Nicholas Cage was overwhelming and universal; they thought the idea sucked.

Pre-production was underway. They were about a month from beginning principal photography when Warner pulled the plug due to the skyrocketing budget. Cage left, and Peters went on to produce *The Wild, Wild West* starring Will Smith and a giant mechanical spider in the third act. It bombed.

Burton left to direct *Sleepy Hollow* with Johnny Depp. Burton said of his time on *Superman*: "I made the movie in my head. We just forgot to film it." Right, Tim.

There has been a revolving door of titles, writers, directors and actors since production was shut down. McG was to direct *Superman Reborn* from a script by J.J. Abrams but left to make *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*. (What? That's better?)

McG was replaced by Brett Ratner, who left when he disagreed with the studio over casting *Superman: Last Son of Krypton*. He wanted an unknown; they wanted a name. Ratner ended up directing *X-Men 3*.

McG returned to direct *Superman: Fly By*, but he disagreed with the studio over locations and left. He wanted to shoot in New York. They wanted to shoot in Australia because it was cheaper. Before you start taking sides, consider that McG also wanted to cast Beyonce Knowles as Lois Lane.

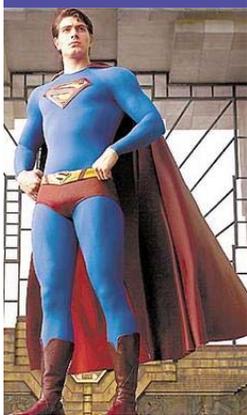
There was a brief flirtation with *Batman Versus Superman* directed by Wolfgang Petersen to jumpstart both franchises, but it was decided to re-ignite both individually and save the team-up film for later (maybe). Petersen went on to direct *Troy*.

What does the 21<sup>st</sup> century hold for Superman fans? *Smallville* premiered on the WB in the fall of 2001. Tom Welling stars as Clark Kent in this show about the early years. The rule is, "No tights. No flights." Christopher Reeve guest-starred as Professor Swan in 2004. In 2001, Cartoon Network started *Justice League* with George Newbern voicing Superman.

On March 11, 2005, cameras rolled on *Superman Returns* directed by *X-Men 1* and 2 director Bryan Singer starring Brandon Routh as Superman/Clark Kent. From everything I've read and heard, it sounds like MAYBE they got it right this time. Cross your fingers and hope. We'll all find out on June 30, 2006.

"Not that I lov'd Caesar less, but that I lov'd Rome more."—Brutus ■

Procurement Officer Peter Chewning



Brandon Routh as Superman

# COMING EVENTS

JULY

July 16..... Now that Shore Leave is over, let's talk about how it went! For directions, check out the insert included with this COMSTAR.

## REFLECTIONS: The Roddenberry complex (continued)

*continued from page 4*

and the *B5* universe paid the price. It was done.

JMS stated proudly that he knew how the overall story arc was going to end. Therefore, he could use plenty of foreshadowing, and that in itself would make this show unique. Unfortunately, his foreshadowing was the show's biggest failing, that and really BAD directors, amateurish writing and God-awful dialogue. JMS started in cartoons, and his dramatic writing shows that.

His foreshadowing was so heavy-handed and revealing that the overall story simply had no twists, turns or surprises whatsoever. The characters were one-dimensional, two-dimensional at best, except for Andreas Katsulas' brilliant rendering of G'Kar. I was excited every time this man was on the screen.

Showtime tapped JMS and Sam Egan to create a series based on a Belgian comic book. *Jeremiah* (No, he wasn't a bullfrog, David!) did one mediocre season and was inexplicably given another, but problems arose, and the show's second season was cancelled before the 13 episodes that were shot could be aired.

Sound familiar? JMS blamed Showtime.

Nowadays, JMS is deep into writing comic books. He's become the source of many rumors, most started by himself. I remember the good old days when he'd spread the rumor that *DS9* was about to be canceled, and every year, the show came back. He later said he was told this by a Paramount executive ... every year. Funny how he could be so chummy with people he claimed ripped him off.

We'd hear about some new series he's supposed to be working on (*Polaris*). He even mentioned the prospect of a *Babylon 5* movie. Lately, he's bragged about being approached by Paramount to do *Star Trek*. He and Bryce Zabel (*Dark Skies*, *The Crow: Stairway to Heaven*) had written a treatment for a re-imagining of *Trek*. Paramount wasn't interested, but it brought things full circle.

JMS indulged his "Roddenberry complex" when he created *Babylon 5*. When that didn't prove popular, he took the next step, creating *Star Trek* in his image. When you can't be God, claim God's creation as your own. ■

*Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard*

## HOLODICTATION: And what of Lazarus?

As I write this on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, a couple of things have happened in my life during the past two weeks. The first is that Sue and I have paid a lot of our bills. The second is that my Dad called and told me that my Uncle Kent had died.

Now, I said goodbye to my uncle a couple of years ago after my grandmother McBee died. While I will miss him, I didn't mourn too long over him. What made me upset was that Dad was told after Uncle Kent was buried, and even his own daughters were not notified until after that.

My uncle was selfish in life and ultimately selfish in death. He thought that the world owed him. While my grandmother was sick, he stayed in Florida and "loved her from a distance." Dad had the responsibility of taking care of her and eventually did the same

for her arrangements and estate.

You all know my Dad well enough to know that he's an easy-going person, and he takes everything in stride. After all of this had happened, I started to think of the Classic *Trek* episode "The Alternative Factor" and how Captain James T. Kirk was concerned about the "sane" Lazarus and how he sacrificed himself for the sake of two universes.

Now Dad has not sacrificed himself for the universe, but he has always put his family and friends before himself. I don't think he'll be fighting evil for eternity, but I hope he finds peace in the fact that he has friends and family who care for him greatly.

But even with all this, I still ponder about him: "What of Lazarus?"

*I love you, Dad.* ■

*Weapons Officer Patrick McBee*



Robert Brown portrayed both versions of Lazarus in "The Alternative Factor."