



A Falcon I rocket at the Vandenberg base similar to the one that will carry Doohan's ashes into space.

## Scotty's final "trek" delayed until February or March 2006

According to *startrek.com*, the remains of James Doohan, who played Scotty in *Star Trek* on television and in films, may have to wait a while longer before arriving in space.

The "Explorers Flight," earlier scheduled for December 6, has been delayed until at least February. This "trek" will carry the ashes of more than 160 participants, including Doohan's.

However, the launch cannot take place until another vehicle is successfully launched in late November or early December. After that, the launch field at Vandenberg Air Force Base shuts down from mid-December until the end of January.

So, look for the flight to take place in February or March of 2006, according to Susan Schonfeld of Space Services, Inc. (SSI), the company providing the memorial flight service.

A public tribute and memorial service for Doohan is planned to take place the day before the Explorers Flight launch, in Lompoc, California, near the air force base. Those interested in attending the service and/or launch viewing party in person should check this site and the SSI site at <http://www.spaceservicesinc.com/>, which is regularly updated. Please note that there only a couple of weeks' notice may be given.

Fans of the actor can continue to participate in the memorial by sending tributes to Doohan that will go into space with him. SSI has created a forum for fans to write messages which will be recorded onto a CD and attached to the payload.

The deadline for submitting a tribute previously was November 15, but SSI will continue to accept messages through at least the first of January. If you haven't submitted a tribute yet, visit the forum at [http://www.nameastarspacelaunch.com/.doohan\\_message.asp?src=startrek](http://www.nameastarspacelaunch.com/.doohan_message.asp?src=startrek).

The flight module containing the ashes of the Explorers Flight participants will piggyback on a commercial satellite launch, on a *Falcon I* rocket developed and operated by Space Exploration Technologies Corporation (SpaceX). It will be SpaceX's second *Falcon I* launch. The maiden flight of the rocket has been delayed due to other activities at Vandenberg, so once it successfully lifts off this month or next, preparations for the next one can begin.

"We are closely in touch with SpaceX," said Charles M. Chafer, CEO of SSI, "and will announce a firm date for the Explorers Flight as soon as we have it."

Watch for more news about this unfolding story as it happens! ■

## Let's be thankful for the November club meeting!

The next meeting of the U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, November 19, at the Hard Times Cafe in College Park, Maryland. Please be sure to bring enough money to pay for your dinner.

We'll gather at 5:00 p.m. to order our dinner. Then, at 7:00 p.m., we'll hold our

monthly club meeting, including information on upcoming conventions, what fellow club members are up to and the latest news regarding *Star Trek* and other science-fiction TV shows and movies.

For directions, be sure to check out the insert that is included with this month's issue of COMSTAR. ■

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## CONN OFFICER'S LOG: In memory of ...

(Editor's note: Captain Randy Hall's monthly column will return next issue!)

I regret to announce the loss of yet another *Star Trek* alumnus: Michael Piller, former executive producer for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

This is difficult because Piller and I have a bit of history together. Back in the early seasons of *Next Generation*, I was busy trying to break into the script-writing field, and *Star Trek* was the only show accepting unsolicited scripts.

I have several rejection notices from the *Next Gen* staff, and I treasure every one of them, but none so much as those I got from Michael Piller. I mention this because when he first joined the writing staff, he was NOT brought on to run the show. Contrary to popular belief, he was just one of its many producers. When Michael Wagner, the show runner who took over for Maurice Hurley, quit abruptly, he suggested Piller, and the rest is history.

"I can't take full credit for our success," Piller said in an interview. "I will claim credit for my contribution, which is that I just have an idea for what I think makes a good dramatic story and that I can help the flow of development in the room."

Show runners almost NEVER read "spec" (speculation) scripts. This job is left to writing assistants or production assistants. Once they recommend your script, THEN a writer or producer may read it. Michael Piller read and rejected my script. I was proud, but I was cautious.

When the third season started, I was terrified. The first two episodes were well written, but I also found them quite boring. They were telling these stories, but nothing of any consequence was going on, much like *Insurrection*.

Piller once told me: "I don't care about plot." I replied that was all fine and good, but without plot, a story does not progress, and this brought me much distress. My favorite show was boring me, and the man in charge wasn't concerned.

Whereas the first few episodes of the season horrified me, the third episode ("The Survivors") placated any reservations I had at the moment. As the Hall brothers can corroborate, I was busy cursing Piller's name most of

that third season. In my opinion, he took a really good action/adventure show (I still think *Next Gen's* second season is among its best.) and changed it to a pseudo-science-fiction soap with "chick flick" aspirations.

It's funny when I think about it now. I had a conversation with Piller after the third season, and we actually agreed that half of the shows were great and the other half were garbage. The problem was that we totally disagreed on what was good and what was garbage. I stopped cursing his name, but I remained guarded about his work.

For me, the show gradually got better. (I fall down on my knees in praise of the fourth season.) It appeared that Piller had discovered the importance of plot and balanced it with the emotional truth he searched for. I always knew he was a good writer once he was given a plot and a theme (Piller was big on theme. He felt that was the most important thing.), and he was a good director of new, young talent.

Piller was not without faults. He could be quite sharp with people working under him. He was not a nice man, but he was occasionally nice to me. When he came to *Trek*, he quickly alienated himself from the writers already there. He had a way of throwing his weight around, plunging the dagger deep into the heart of a writer and turning the dagger slowly.

I know a guy who pitched to him, and in mid-pitch, Piller stopped him and asked how long he had been a writer. I told the guy that was typical Piller. He was not well liked among his staff. Hell, the entire staff of *Voyager* threatened to quit unless he was let go.

He went on to create some very good television.

*Legend*, although rarely viewed by the mass public, was a really good show. A western starring Richard Dean Anderson and John deLancie, it was both funny and touching.

*The Dead Zone* is a noble, if not always on target, but occasionally brilliant offering starring Anthony Michael Hall. It continues today with Piller's son mostly in charge.

Whereas my opinion of the man bordered on love/hate, I've always had an underlying respect for him and his work. He was always very cordial to me, even though I always

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Michael Piller talks to fans about *Star Trek*.

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# SCIENCE TREK: Playing god

Before we get to this month's column, I'd like to hand out a link to one of my favorite Web sites: Astronomy Picture of the Day at <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>. The picture on Thursday, November 10, reflected a topic we've discussed here as recently as September: asteroids and Earths.

The science-fictional picture is of a "gravitational tractor." That is, a spacecraft large enough to change the orbit of an asteroid (on the order of 200 meters across, not a dino-killer) using low-acceleration ion thrusters and the force called gravity (you know, two objects, attractive force). By the time you read this column, you can see it at <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap051110.html>.

Now back to our regularly scheduled column. So there I was, minding my own business, reading *COMSTAR*, when I came across that stalwart column of page 6—"Holodictation." Discussing the hurricanes that swept the southeast this year and last, Patrick praised Earth's weather control system. He concluded: "I'm only asking for paradise. What's wrong with that?" What's wrong indeed?

On the surface, it's a great idea. Eliminate or control forces that devastate lives and communities as well as cause millions/billions/trillions to be spent in response and recovery (plus a few token cents for preparedness and mitigation). Quoth the West Virginian: "No more hurricanes, tornados, floods or ice and snow storms!" As I considered the concept, an uneasy feeling took hold.

Action-reaction, Newton's first law. It's a fact of physics (just a theory, though, in Kansas), but it can also apply in a grander sense. If we "change the laws of physics," how does nature push back? Let's say we develop the means to stop or mitigate hurricanes and tornados, control flooding or consign ice and snow storms to the ski slopes. If that's the cause, what's the effect?

In the last century, the U.S. dedicated considerable resources to stomping out wild fires. Whether started by a pyromaniac, a careless camper or a bolt of lightning, we went after the fires with all the forces we could muster. Have to put out the fire before it destroys homes and businesses; kills the tiny, tiny babies and Bambies, and damages

the economy/eco-system/etc. What has only become apparent in the past decade or so is that while stopping the pyro and the camper is a good thing, the bolt of lightning is a spark to more than just a fire.



Natural fires are part of a larger process by which nature clears out the underbrush and creates fertile soil. In other words, it's nature's system for cleansing and ultimately sustaining the eco-system. We were destroying the very thing we were trying to protect.

Another example: Consider how the Army Corp of Engineers (primarily, but the states as well) have altered the course of the Mississippi River with levees to control it and force it around settled areas. Now consider not just New Orleans of 2005, but the floods of 1993 and 1927.

If two examples aren't enough, consider the series of naturally shifting barrier islands off the coast of the eastern United States and the effect of trying to stop their motion so people can build their houses upon the islands.

Similar to what McCoy noted about the brain in Randy's not-least-favorite episode, "Spock's Brain," we don't know everything about nature and nature's processes—not now and likely not even in the 24<sup>th</sup> century. I'm not trying to stop you from playing god, just giving you something to think about. ■

## Web Notes:

- <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html> (in case you're one of those people who skip right to the Web Notes);
- [http://www.nrcan-rncan.gc.ca/cfs-scf/science/prodserv/firereport/firereport\\_e.php](http://www.nrcan-rncan.gc.ca/cfs-scf/science/prodserv/firereport/firereport_e.php) (Forest fires, eh, to the north, eh); and
- [http://lists.uakron.edu/geology/natscigeo/lectures/streams/miss\\_flood.htm](http://lists.uakron.edu/geology/natscigeo/lectures/streams/miss_flood.htm) (1993, the year of the floods).

*Second Officer Phil Margolies*

ART CREDITS:  
[startrek.com](http://startrek.com) 1, 2, 5, 6  
[images.google.com](http://images.google.com)  
3, 4, Insert back  
Dynamic Graphics  
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## REFLECTIONS: *Sliders*

“The one duty we owe to history is to re-write it.”—Oscar Wilde

Time dragged at a tectonic pace. It was almost as if the universe had fallen into a black hole and I was stuck near the event horizon. I was like a child at Christmas, waiting with bated breath as the Sci-Fi Channel’s original programming stubbornly refused to hurry up and air.

In order to placate my interest, I sought out everything I could about these new shows. Much to my chagrin, there was little to be found on two of the proposed series (*Farscape* and *First Wave*), but I was very familiar with the third show, *Sliders*.

*Sliders* first aired on FOX Sundays in 1994 as a bridge from football to its evening comedy line-up.

For the uninitiated, the show was about Quinn Mallory (Jerry O’Connell), a physics grad student who accidentally created a gateway to parallel universes. He decided to investigate this parallel sliding with help from his physics professor, Maximillian Arturo (John Rhys-Davies), and computer expert girl friend (though Quinn doesn’t realize it), Wade Wells (Sabrina Lloyd).

Rounding out the group was former R & B singer Rembrandt “Crying Man” Brown (Clevant Derricks), who just happened to be driving his Cadillac through the neighborhood on his way to Candlestick Park (It’s now 3 Con-Park.) to sing the national anthem, when he and his car were engulfed by the wormhole because Quinn attempted to widen it to accommodate Wade and the professor. (Arturo was obviously larger than I thought.)

This was partially the brainchild of ex-SCTV, ex-*Saturday Night Live* and ex-*Next Generation* writer (and one of MY favorite television scribes) Tracy Torme, and yes, jazz-singing great Mel Torme IS his father. “I was reading about George Washington,” Torme said. “The only thing holding the rebel army together at that time was him. If Washington had been killed, the revolution is over. There is NO United States.”

After pitching the idea of a reality-shifting series to FOX, Torme and producer Robert Weiss began looking closely at great moments in history, realizing that the slightest change or quirk often would have changed everything.

“Tracy and I were fans of alternative realities and have always been interested in speculative fiction,” said Weiss. “We were looking for a way to explore these other places, these ‘what if’ scenarios.”

Torme originally wanted to do the show as a comedy but was torn between that and straightforward science fiction. Robert Weiss suggested they do both.

“I’m not a big fan of the *Star Wars* movies,” said Torme. “For me, they’re nice and they’re entertaining, but 100 bad guys could be standing there shooting at you and they’ll never hit you. You shoot five times and they all keel over. The type of science fiction that appeals to me is REAL science fiction. If I’m watching something and I believe in the reality of it and it has a fantastic element to it, that’s the best there is.”

Despite football overruns (which killed *Space: Above and Beyond*), naysayers and musical time slots, a nine-episode first season commitment, cancellation, mid-season reinstatement, revolving cast members and finally, network jumping, *Sliders* was witty, engaging, funny and intelligent with a modicum of continuing plot lines.

I am still convinced that at the end of season two, the professor was killed and replaced by an “evil” Professor Arturo from another reality who took his place amongst our heroes. A wholesale change of the writing staff and a jump to the Sci-Fi Channel prevented them from exploring this further.

With the addition of Bill Dial (*WKRP in Cincinnati*, *Legend* and various *Trek* episodes), Chris Black (*Odyssey 5* and *Enterprise*) and Marc Zicree (*Twilight Zone* expert responsible for *DS9*’s “Far Beyond the Stars”), *Sliders* took on a darker perspective, and the episodes became more serialized than before.

Throughout its run, especially in its first season, the show ran such chestnuts as the pilot episode; “Last Days,” in which a meteor is heading toward Earth in two days but our group can’t slide for another THREE days; “Prince of Wails” in which America lost the Revolutionary War and the group teams up with a band of woodland outlaws (the Oakland Raiders) to thwart the sheriff of San Francisco; “Summer of Love” in which Ollie North is president, America is at war with

*Continued on page 6*



The original cast of *Sliders*

# RANTINGS: The pizzeria is out of business

*Star Trek: Nemesis* is the last of the “Special Collector’s Edition DVDs,” at least until Paramount decides to “revive” *Star Trek* and gouge us out of our hard-earned quatlous with more overpriced crap. I could go off on a rant about that, but there’s an old Polish proverb: “A truly wise man never plays leap-frog with a unicorn.”

Anyway, let’s start this review off as we always do. On Disc 1, along with the feature, are the usual audio commentaries by Director Stuart Baird and text commentary by Michael and Denise Okuda. Yadda, yadda, yadda.

I had the same experience watching *Nemesis* that I did with *Insurrection*: It was NOT as bad as I remembered it. While no moments in this made me cringe, nothing was inspired, either.

The entire film was a rehash of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* done twice as loud and nowhere nearly as well.

And from the “I watched it so you won’t have to” department: On Disc 2, the geekcrap disc, are the standard sections we’ve come to expect. There’s really nothing new or exciting in any of this. It seems they were thinking: “We have to do this one last time to complete the set.” SNORE!

In the Production section is *Nemesis Revisited*, *New Frontiers: Stuart Baird on Directing Nemesis*, *Storyboarding the Action*, *Red Alert! Shooting the Action of Nemesis*, *Build and Rebuild* and *Four-Wheeling in the Final Frontier*, all of which are cures for insomnia.

Only the *Shinzon Screen Test* contains anything interesting at all, a very intense scene between Tom Hardy and Patrick Stewart that was very engrossing.

In fact, I found myself wishing that the whole film was like this in tone. It would have been a helluva lot better.

In the *Star Trek Universe* section, the programs *A Star Trek Family’s Final Journey* and *A Bold Vision of the Final Frontier* also hold nothing new or of interest. The program *The Enterprise E* is a semi-interesting explanation about how the bridge of the *Enterprise E* also doubled as the bridge of the Romulan Warbird.

The best section is the Romulan Empire. The *Romulan Lore* program has a very nice montage retrospective exploring the Romu-

lans from the Original Series to *Enterprise* and then an interview with Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens, which is essentially a shameless plug for the *Captain’s Blood* trilogy. The programs *Shinzon and the Viceroy*, *Romluan Design*, the *Romluan Senate* and *The Scimitar* add very little but filler.

The Archives section, as with all the others, is better off run through the DVD-ROM drive on your computer to look at the *Storyboards*, *Production* and *Props*.

In the Deleted Scenes section, there is some footage that would have made *Nemesis* a MUCH BETTER FILM, including an alternate ending in which the *Enterprise E* takes off on its next mission, with a new first officer.

In Trailers are the standard teaser and theatrical trailers for the movie as well as the BORG-4D at the Lost Wages Hilton.

So that brings the Special Collection DVDs to an end. Big fat hairy freakin’ deal. I don’t understand this incessant need to keep recycling the same crapola over and over again. Once was enough, but try telling that to Paramount.

Recently, George Takei came out and told the world that he’s gay. There were the usual juvenile jokes on the part of some: “Fire Phasers or Fire Island?” etc. As I wrote in a post, why is this even an issue?

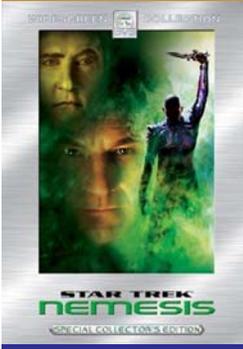
I think it takes a great deal of courage to stand up publicly and admit something for which the more paranoid, bigoted, hysterical and hateful members of our society will attack you. It saddens me that society hasn’t progressed beyond the point where people get squicked out by another’s sexuality.

I’ve said it before: I do not give a damn if a person wants to have sex with men or women, in groups or by themselves, while hanging upside down from a winch or being flogged by someone dressed in a chicken suit, as long as it’s safe, sane and consensual behavior between adults. If you know what gets you off, more power to you.

If Lorenzo gets off by visiting *goatman.com*, that’s HIS business and no one else’s. It’s supposed to be about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, isn’t it?

*Now go we in content to liberty, and not to banishment.*—Celia ■

*Procurement Officer Peter Chewning*



# COMING EVENTS

NOVEMBER

November 19 ..... We'll gather at the Hard Times Cafe in College Park, Maryland.

## CONN OFFICER'S LOG: In memory of ... concluded

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thought he considered me a bit of a flake, or at the very least, insane.

His creation of one *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* has elevated him to near-deity status in my mind, and because of that, has earned a

permanent shrine wherever I reside forever and ever, amen.

I know you will rest in peace, Michael Piller, for it awaits you at the edge of the final frontier. ■

*Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard*

## REFLECTIONS: *Sliders* concluded

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Australia and the "Summer of Love" never ended; "Eggheads," a personal favorite featuring a world where nerds and scientists were treated the way we treat sports figures, and "The King Is Back," with a world where Rembrandt Brown was as big as Elvis.

By the second season, the show was inspired by whatever movies were hot at the time (*Jurassic Park*, *X-Files*, etc.), but also included a great villain in the Kromaggs, who would later become a dominant factor throughout the third season. In the first

episode of the third season, they actually make it back to their reality only to find it invaded by the Kromaggs, who capture and torture Rembrandt and Wade. Only Rembrandt survives. That's bold for any show!

"There 's only so many ways you can do a cop show or a sitcom," Torme relayed. "But science fiction is just so limitless. When you're dealing with space or with time travel or with interdimensional sliding or whatever, there's just no limit on what you can do. Your imagination can totally run wild." ■

*Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard*

## HOLODICTATION: "Mirror, Mirror"

As I sit down to write my monthly column, I look at the news of the month and those items I've placed around my work area. These give me inspiration of what I'm going to write.

Some months, it's very easy to sit and pound out my thoughts because of certain things that have happened in my life, and some months, I have to really sit and think of what to write about.

As I ponder what's happened to me and in the *Star Trek* universe over the past 30 days, two things come to mind: Michael Piller passed away, and George Takei stated that he's gay.

Michael Piller was a very big part of *Star Trek: TNG*. He gave us a lot of different characters to either love or hate. He had a passion for doing what he did. He was not just limited to *Star Trek*; he knew that he'd have to be diverse to survive the craziness that is the entertainment industry. One of the things he did was *Legend*. I kind of liked this show. Some of the inventions were far-fetched, but

it was enjoyable.

The second thing is that George Takei made the statement that he's gay. In my opinion, that's no big deal. It's his life, and my opinion of him has not and will not change. If you've read his autobiography, you'd know all that's happened in his life. He must have felt some kind of pressure holding this in him, and making the statement had helped him ease something inside.

I've always thought that each of us has this alter ego inside that we don't want to expose to anyone, and that sometimes, we'd like to go into the "Mirror, Mirror" universe and see what life would be like. If you look at that *Star Trek* episode, you'll find that even though a lot of things change, some things still stay the same. I've liked all the episodes that journey into that alternate universe.

Be careful when you peek through the looking glass because you might just find something you don't want to know.

*Take care, friends!* ■

*Weapons Officer Patrick McBee*



George Takei as the alternate Mister Sulu in Classic *Trek*'s "Mirror, Mirror."