



Star Trek: Of Gods and Men new Web film begins shooting

While J.J. Abrams is busy considering the next *Star Trek* feature film, what's a fan to do?

Principal photography commenced recently in New York state on what is billed as a "40th Anniversary Gift to *Trek* Fans." The new Web-only mini-series, *Star Trek: Of Gods and Men*, will feature several *Star Trek* actors and even some production crew members, including Tim Russ, who portrayed Lieutenant Tuvok on *Voyager*, as director.

The series was conceived and written by producer Sky Douglas Conway, together with former *Deep Space Nine* freelance storywriters Jack Trevino and Ethan H. Calk.

The stellar cast for *Star Trek: Of Gods and Men* includes both original and more current *Trek* actors: Original Series stars Nichelle Nichols (Uhura), Walter Koenig (Chekov) and Grace Lee Whitney (Rand) will be working along with Alan Ruck (Captain John Harman, *Star Trek: Generations*), Garrett Wang (Harry Kim, *Voyager*), Chase Masterson (Leeta, *Deep Space Nine*), J.G. Hertzler (Martok, *DS9*), and Gary Graham (Soval, *Enterprise*) and Crystal Allen (D'Nesh, *Enterprise*). Russ will appear in the film as well as helm it. Many from the same team that created the short film *Roddenberry on Patrol* are involved, which was also directed by Russ.

The idea is to produce the series in three

parts, each approximately 30 minutes in length, to be released exclusively on the Internet as a download. The timing couldn't be better as the phenomenon of Internet-only episodes — or "webisodes" — is gaining momentum, especially as there is no current *Star Trek* show in production.

"I'm very excited about the script," enthused Nichelle Nichols. "And I'm looking forward to re-creating Uhura in a time line that feels good to me. I think the fans will enjoy it immensely!"

"The original series was in danger of being cancelled after the second season, and the fans came through," said Walter Koenig. "Once again, after 40 years, with the support and enthusiasm of the fans, *Star Trek* will have another life on the Internet — and I'm very pleased to be part of it."

"I'm looking forward to working with a lot of fine actors," exclaimed Tim Russ. "It's a nostalgia-based *Trek* project — and I think the fans will really get a kick out of it. We've never seen this kind of *Trek* story before."

"The character I'm playing is completely opposite from my *Voyager* character," said Garrett Wang, "and it's always more challenging for an actor to play a bad guy."

For more information, check out <http://www.StarTrekOfGodsandMen.com>. ■

Discuss Shore Leave 28 at the July meeting!

The July meeting of the U.S.S. Chesapeake *Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, July 22, at the Hard Times Cafe located in College Park, Maryland.

We'll gather at 5:00 p.m. for dinner, followed by our club meeting, which will begin no later than 7:00 p.m. We'll talk about the recent Shore Leave 28 convention, what fellow

club members are up to and the latest news regarding *Star Trek* and other science-fiction television shows and movies.

Do you need to get directions to be able to travel to the June meeting? Then you should be sure to check out the insert that you can download to your computer from our online Yahoo! Group. ■

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CAPTAIN'S LOG: From crewman to captain

Our first view of Hikaru Sulu came during *Star Trek's* second pilot, "Where No Man Has Gone Before." At that point, he was a physicist who explained Gary Mitchell's growing power with the illustration of a penny whose value doubles every day.

Looking back, that was a curious example for Sulu to use, since all money had been done away with by that time. Still, I guess his crewmates were up on economic history!

Sulu's role on the *Enterprise* changed dramatically after the show became a full-fledged series. He moved into the command track (hence the gold shirt) and became the ship's helmsman.

Serving on the bridge was always good for a *Star Trek* character, as it put him or her in the middle of the action and often led to being chosen as a member of a landing party or away team.

That was the case with Sulu, who was a man of many hobbies during "Charlie X" and asked for a pot of coffee while down on a freezing planet during "The Enemy Within."

Of course, Sulu's best-known appearance took place in "The Naked Time," when an alien virus released crew members' inhibitions and our favorite helmsman fenced his way into *Trek* history.

Like most things dealing with pointy weapons, Sulu's fencing proved to be a double-edged sword. While it gave fans something to easily remember him by (other than the fact that he was the Oriental member of a multi-national crew), it also came to define him in many non-TV storylines.

Look at the novels, comics and audios. When Sulu's the lead character, the adventure almost always boils down to him fencing with someone or something.

Some fans have speculated that Kirk always checked out planets on the *Enterprise* itinerary, and when he found a beautiful woman, he was the one to go down to the planet. If it was all old men or funky aliens, Spock got the job.

Using that theory, it seems that Sulu looked up all the planets in the quadrant where some form of fencing was popular, and then, he volunteered to be on the landing party.

We might even have seen more of that on the TV show, except that as the series pro-

gressed, we saw less and less of Sulu.

That didn't happen because the helmsman was off somewhere practicing his fencing. Actually, George Takei kept getting work in other projects, the most notable being the movie *The Green Berets*.

As a result, a lot of Sulu's bits had to be rewritten, and the major beneficiary of Takei's absences was Chekov, who had joined the cast at the start of the second season.

A perfect example of this was "The Gamemasters of Triskelion." Sulu was to have shared the transporter pad with Kirk and Uhura, but Takei was replaced with Walter Koenig's character.

Remember when a drill thrall kept mispronouncing Chekov's name as "Cheekhoof" or something like that? She was supposed to be calling Sulu "Soolooey."

Those extra appearances boosted Chekov's popularity, and Sulu didn't get many other interesting things to do for the rest of the series.

Even when the show graduated to movies, Sulu's parts always seemed to end up on the cutting room floor.

Hikaru was supposed to get a promotion during *The Wrath of Khan*, but Shatner claimed his schedule wouldn't permit the filming of that scene. Sulu ran into an ancestor of his as part of *The Voyage Home*, but guess which scene got cut when the film ran long?

However, Sulu did get one line in *Star Trek IV* that led to bigger and better things for the character. As the crew shuttled toward their new ship, Hikaru said he was hoping for the *U.S.S. Excelsior*.

While he served on the *Enterprise A* for *The Final Frontier*, he became captain of the *Excelsior* in *The Undiscovered Country*, during which he said my favorite line the character ever uttered.

When racing to help the *Enterprise*, Sulu demanded that the *Excelsior* go faster. After a crewman responded that going any faster would make ship fly apart, the captain yelled: "Fly her apart, then!"

Scenes like that led me to support the effort to produce an *Excelsior* series, and I would still enjoy seeing a TV movie of Sulu and his crew. ■

Captain Randy Hall



Helmsman Hikaru Sulu

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SCIENCE TREK: Flying free

One of the coolest things I've ever done is go for a space walk. Okay, I didn't actually walk, and I wasn't really in space (Alabama's close, right?), but it was still an awesome experience. Many a year ago, in my last semester of college, two classmates and I ventured down to the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, a key NASA research and production facility.

Going through the center tour, we came across a simulation of NASA's first operational rocket pack for astronauts called the Manned Maneuvering Unit (MMU). They asked for a volunteer, and it was yours truly who stepped forward for some reason.

They strapped me into a chair with the simulated MMU on my back, moved me 20 feet from the audience and said I had to simply turn around and make my way back to the audience. Took me about five minutes, but I did it.

(Yeah, it seems simple, but remember Newton's laws — objects in motion and equal and opposite forces, *et al* — propel yourself too much one way and you have to counter the force to stop and overcounter it to move back. Takes a little practice.)

The real MMU lasted only three missions during 1984 but was retired because of the *Challenger* disaster (safety reasons). In 1994, however, NASA introduced the next generation of rocket pack, the Simplified Aid For EVA Rescue (SAFER).

The modern unit is not intended for general use; as the name implies, it's for emergency purposes — every spacewalker wears one. Both units use nitrogen as the propellant. However, SAFER is smaller, less complicated and less powerful than MMU.

MMU contained nearly 6 kg of nitrogen and could change an astronaut's velocity up to 80 feet per second, while SAFER contains only about 1.5 kg of nitrogen and has a delta-v of about 10 feet per second.

Astronauts Michael Fossum and Piers Sellers of

this month's *Discovery* mission wore the SAFER packs, which provided some excitement when Sellers' unit became partly detached during a spacewalk.

Before the rocket pack and the spacewalk were science facts, they were literally the stuff of science fiction. Rocket packs have been part of space fiction since the days of the original Buck Rogers. In *Star Trek*, Spock used a pack to fly to V'ger and perform his mind meld in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

Now, here's the fun part of this month's column: Find three other examples of rocket packs in science-fiction television shows (not books, not movies) without using Google and submit them on three pieces of 5x8 teal newspaper stock to the address at the bottom of this column, and you will be entered to win your very own rocket pack (previously used)! (Apologies to Click and Clack.) ■

Web Notes:

- <http://www.astronautix.com/craft/shulemmu.htm> (Short and simple, like the MMU.);
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manned_Manoeuvring_Unit (Gotta ref Wiki.);
- <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-4219/Chapter13.html> (Your gov't \$ @ work.); and
- <http://www.mel.nist.gov/div821/museum/timeline.htm> (Gotta have a list).

Second Officer Phil Margolies

The first USA spacewalk, during Gemini 4.



ART CREDITS:
startrek.com 1, 2,
Insert front
nasa.gov 3
images.google.com
4, 5, 6, Insert back

REFLECTIONS: The end of the chase

Brian Henson is a stubborn man. Like James T. Kirk, he doesn't take "no" for an answer. He continued to trot out his presentation package – drawings of characters and interiors, models – and went on a slow march around the world for about three years, pitching his show to any network and production company that would listen.

"Every once in a while, we'd go out and talk to people about it," O'Bannon recalls, "but what we were suggesting as a weekly series was always too daunting."

Rod Perth, president of the Sci Fi Channel, had received two of O'Bannon's scripts and excitedly told his wife that he had found what he was looking for. At the same time, the Henson Company was trying to find co-production finance outside America. As discussions continued with the Sci Fi Channel, another key figure entered into the quest for financing.

Yes, Sci Fi was interested, but as it was, the show would be too costly to produce for them. Even with the high cost, Rod Perth remained anxious. Matt Carroll, an Australian film and television producer, stepped in with a proposal to lower the production cost by doing the actual shooting in Australia.

"I just kept putting through ways of how we could structure it so it could be made in Australia," Carroll said. "It was an ideal project for Australia because we could make it for the budget that they had. So the project wasn't compromised at all in terms of the way Rockne envisaged it."

Brian Henson wasn't the only person to keep hope alive and persevere with his aspirations. O'Bannon continued for three years to keep abreast of Henson's progress or lack thereof. And he wasn't the only one. Like Henson and O'Bannon, David Kemper was also unwilling to give up on *Space Chase*.

"When a show dies in Hollywood, it dies," Kemper revealed. "Every year, my agent said: '*Space Chase* is dead.' I said, 'No, no. Brian's going to try to sell it.' So in every contract thereafter, I had a clause that if *Space Chase* ever started, I could walk off the show I was on."

"I was working on *Pacific Blue* in October of '97, and I got a call from Rock saying, 'You're not going to believe this; I think we've sold the show.' So I waited until it was

official, in January '98, we went to Australia. Rockne started to rewrite the pilot script, and I started working on ideas for the season. In February, Rock and I started on these ideas ourselves, and on May 1, full pre-production began. The day we started, we were already about four months behind!

"With Matt Carroll pulling together a behind-the-camera creative team from the cream of down-under talent and with actors being auditioned on both sides of the Pacific for the leading roles, the final major change was put into place. The show needed another name. *Space Chase* just wasn't makin' it.

"Let's invent a word for our title," Rockne said, 'because if we want something that's truly unique, we probably can't describe the dynamic that we're talking about with any existing word that will say 'It's Sci Fi' without creating some expectations.'

"All of our broadcasters were really nervous about us making up a word," Brian Henson remembered. "They asked: 'How do you market that?' Our argument was: create a word, and that becomes the identity of the show. You can find it on the Internet if you want to know about *Farscape*. You just do a search for that word, and all you will find is stuff about our show. You put in *Farscape*, you only get us."

"Brian Henson did something that people don't do in this business. You work for big companies, and they're institutions. A project dies, and it dies. Your executives go and hire other writers, they create something else. But Brian, stunningly, had a passion for this show and because it was a family-owned company, with him in charge, no one was telling him, 'You have to let go of your dream.'

"There'd be no *Farscape* if Brian Henson hadn't held on for five years and said, 'I'm going to make *Farscape*. I'm not letting the show die!' There's no *Farscape* if Rock doesn't write any scripts, but boy, there would be no *Farscape* if Brian Henson hadn't gone back and sold what was essentially a dead project. Brian KNEW he could produce a good show, and he made it live through that act of dedication."

Next month: You know how it got started. Now, you'll see how it ran. ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard



RANTINGS: Even Dark Knights can crash and burn

The Batmania caused by the spectacular performance of 1989's *Batman* ensured a sequel. *Batman Returns* took an even darker approach to Batman. It featured Danny Devito and Michelle Pfeiffer as the Penguin and Catwoman, opening in June 1992.

It continued some traditions begun in the previous film. It grossed over \$160 million domestically, ensuring that the film series would continue. *Batman Returns* was nominated for Best Makeup and Best Visual Effects at the 66th Academy Awards.

In fact, 1992 was a banner Year of the Bat. Creative team Paul Dini and Bruce Timm's *Batman: The Animated Series* premiered on Fox with the episode "On Leather Wings." Kevin Conroy provided the voice of Batman.

It was a huge hit and set new standards for animated television.

Cartoons were not just for kids. Many fans took the view that this series was "Batman like he ought to be."

In one episode, Adam West returned to the world of Batman as the voice of the Grey Ghost, Bruce Wayne's childhood hero. A comic

adaptation, *The Batman Adventures* #1, premiered and ran for years. The series won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Animated Program for the episode "Robin's Reckoning."

In the comics, changes came hard and fast. Tim Drake became the third Robin in *Batman* #487. In June, a new comic book, *Batman: Shadow of the Bat* #1, premiered. In October, Jean-Paul Valley (Azrael) made his debut in the four-part series *Batman: Sword of Azrael*.

After "The Death of Superman," DC put all their heroes through "death and resurrection." In 1993, Bane made his first appearance in *Vengeance of Bane* #1 in 1993, which revealed why he was determined to destroy Batman.

At the peak of Denny O'Neil's "Knight-fall" story arc, Bane broke Batman's back, opening the door for a temporary substitute, Azrael, in *Batman* #497. The problem was that Valley was more of an avenger than Batman, so the "Mantle of the Bat" was taken

from Jean-Paul Valley and given briefly to Dick Grayson (Nightwing).

In December 1993, the animated movie *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* was released to theatres, featuring a new villain along with the Joker. The film was a success. Back in the comics, over the next couple of years, Robin, Catwoman, Azrael and Nightwing all got their own series. Prep work began for the third Batman film, but BIG changes were coming.

Fans had tired of the Tim Burton influence on the films. They wanted more action and less gothic introspection. Burton was bumped up to producer, and Joel Schumacher was brought in to direct the film.

Michael Keaton was tired of the hero being upstaged by the villains and hung up the cape and cowl. *Batman Forever* premiered in June 1995 with Batman played by Val Kilmer and Robin by Chris O'Donnell, plus Tommy Lee Jones and Jim Carrey as Two-Face and the Riddler.

Batman Forever was nominated for Best Cinematography, Best Sound and Best Sound Effects Editing at the 69th Academy Awards. Val Kilmer abandoned the role shortly after the release of the film, opting to play Simon Templar in *The Saint* and promptly disappearing off the franchise market.

In 1997, *Batman & Robin* premiered, again directed by Joel Schumacher with George Clooney starring as Batman and Chris O'Donnell returning as Robin, Alicia Silverstone as Batgirl, plus Arnold Schwarzenegger and Uma Thurman as Mister Freeze and Poison Ivy.

Fans were revolted by Schumacher's homoerotic take on the characters and with nipples on the Batsuit. It was an inglorious end to the Batman movie series. This film was closest in tone to the old Adam West *Batman* series. *Batman: Sub-Zero*, the animated movie featuring Mister Freeze, went directly to video and was embraced by the fans, eclipsing the live-action film.

Even though the movie *Batman & Robin* was a turd, this did not kill production of the Caped Crusader. In the fall of 1997, *The New Batman Adventures* premiered on the WB, picking up where *Batman: TAS* left off.

It was teamed with *Superman: The Animated Series* for an hour on Saturday morning

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COMING EVENTS

JULY

July 22 We'll get together for our July meeting to talk about the recent Shore Leave convention. We'll journey back to the Hard Times Cafe in College Park, Maryland! Let's gather at 5:00 p.m. for our dinner, then hold our meeting no later than 7:00 p.m. Be sure to get directions from the Insert in our Yahoo! Group.

RANTINGS: Even Dark Knights can crash ... concluded

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on the WB and launched with a three-parter presenting their first team-up, a battle against Lex Luthor and the Joker, and was later released to video in movie form.

Batman Beyond was a cartoon about a futuristic Gotham City that premiered on Kids' WB in 1999. It highlighted an elderly

Bruce Wayne mentoring high school student Terry McGinnis as the new Batman. Kevin Conroy voiced Bruce Wayne/Batman in this series as well.

"Let every eye negotiate for itself and trust no agent; for beauty is a witch against whose charms faith melteth in blood." — Claudio ■

Procurement Officer Peter Chewning

WAYNE'S WORLDS: The 4400

This occasional column will return as needed, usually when space permits in issues of COMSTAR.

Summers used to be a down time, when a science-fiction fan could catch up on DVDs or reading. But Ira Behr is once again changing the landscape of television, this time with USA Network's *The 4400*.

Each Sunday night at 9, *The 4400* explores another universe, this one inhabited by 4,400 abductees who apparently were taken to the future, given special abilities, then returned to "our" time to right a cosmic wrong that threatens the world.

Ira Behr, who strutted his stuff while helming *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, has taken over this show, which was created by fellow *DS9* alumnus Rene Echeverria, and put his trademark on it, with well-rounded characters, gripping storylines and surprises — plenty of surprises!

The show focuses on two main characters who are partners working at NTAC, the National Threat Assessment Command, located in the Pacific Northwest. Tom Baldwin and Diana Skouris both either have or develop ties to the 4400, so they have a personal stake in what happens to them. Tom's nephew Shawn, who has healing abilities, has become the 4400's leader, while Diana's adopted daughter, Maia, can see the future.

The 4400 were gathered from different decades, so their attempts to have "normal"

lives are often complicated by their pasts as well as their new powers.

Now in its third season, *The 4400* is part of a group of cable "summer" shows that take advantage of the fact that the "main" networks are either in reruns or running *American Idol*-like talent competition shows.

And it seems to be working well for the USA Network. Ratings are good, and DVD sales are doing well for those interested in catching up on previous seasons.

The 4400 in previous years has had mostly stand-alone episodes, with some continuity ties from week to week. This year, however, the show is endeavoring to introduce as many 4400s as possible in an ongoing storyline Behr similar to those he made famous on *DS9*.

Perhaps the most interesting — and most frightening — character on the show is Isabelle, who is actually not a 4400. She was conceived before her mother was sent back in time. She was born shortly after the group's appearance, and as a baby, she wrought havoc wherever she went.

Now she's turned into a young woman through an unanticipated aging spurt. Imagine a teenager with tremendous power and you can see just how dangerous she is! She gets what she wants, or else!

If you enjoyed *DS9*, you will definitely want to keep up with this engaging series. And besides, what else is on each Sunday night? ■

Chief of Security Wayne Hall

THE
4400