

COMSTAR

Publication of the U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek and Science-Fiction Club
December, 2006

Time to party! Enjoy the 2006 holiday meeting!

Let's celebrate the season as only the crew of the U.S.S. *Chesapeake Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club can do on Saturday night, December 16, for what has long been one of our most popular and enjoyable events of the entire year!

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

We'll kick off the holiday festivities with our dinner at 5:00 p.m., which is again being coordinated this year by Second Officer Phil Margolies.

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard will be cooking turkey and some veggies for club members to enjoy, so be sure to come hungry and bring plenty of food to share with your crewmates.

At 7:00 p.m., we'll start our monthly business meeting, which will include the latest updates on club member activities (including signing birthday cards), finding out the most recent news in *Star Trek* and other science fiction, and planning many of our discussion panels for the fan-run Far-

point convention that will be held in Hunt Valley (north of Baltimore), Maryland, in mid-February. Of course, that always depends on good weather — in other words, if there isn't any snow.

We'll also be talking about other conventions that will take place over the next year, including Shore Leave during July, 2007.

At some point during the evening, we'll participate in our annual gift exchange. Be sure that you bring at least one wrapped science-fiction-related gift costing no more than \$20. Chief of Security Wayne Hall will manage this annual event. It's always fun to see what the creative minds in the club have sought out and brought to exchange with (and then steal from) other club members!

Enjoy our time together as we share the holiday spirit! It's been a great anniversary year for the club, so let's wrap it up with yet another fun gathering to end 2006!

If you need directions to Ann's home, be sure that you check out the front page of this month's Insert that you can find in our club's Yahoo! Group! ■

CAPTAIN'S LOG: A tree-trimming "enterprise"

It's been a wild and crazy year. Not only did we celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Star Trek*, but we also marked the 15th birthday of the U.S.S. *Chesapeake*! Now, *that's* what I call a fun 12 months!

However, 2006 is also the 15th anniversary of another *Trek* icon, and I almost missed it! Along with the release of *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, a company known for sending the very best greeting cards began a tradition that has benefited Trekkers' Christmas trees to this day.

Yep, that was when the very first Hallmark *Star Trek* Christmas ornament was released. Looking back on it now, I'm not as impressed with their first effort as I used to be. Of course, it was a model of the U.S.S. *Enterprise*, but while later years' miniatures have been nothing short of incredible, this one was ... not.

Don't get me wrong; it was great to have something to hang on the tree that looked like the most famous starship of all, but while the ornament was basically "ship shape," the little touches weren't.

Though it did boast the letters and numbers NCC-1701, they were way too big and in the wrong type style. Also, four little light bulbs were placed around the saucer section in alternating colors of green and red (to commemorate Christmas, you see). Sigh.

Still, it was a brand new *Star Trek* item, and as such, it flew out of stores at warp speed. As a result, the price seemed to double every time I turned around. Even now, a decade and a half later, it will cost you between \$200 and \$400 to get one.

By the way, I do have one, and no, I don't hang it on any trees. It sits with all my other *Star Trek* super-valuables in the captain's "safe," and you can bet that combination is a doozy!

In 1992, Hallmark put out a nicely accurate version of the *Galileo* 7 shuttle, with Leonard Nimoy's voice wishing you a merry Christmas! That sold extremely well, too, and thus was established the tradition of having new *Trek* to adorn the holiday plant life every December.

You have to give the folks at Hallmark credit. Most ornaments are highly detailed and look like the ships and characters they're



The *Enterprise* Hallmark ornament released in 1991.

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supposed to resemble. They're also not so small as to be swallowable, nor so big that they weigh down the tree branches.

I still put the ones featuring Kirk in the captain's chair (one of my favorites), Spock at the science station and McCoy in the transporter booth at the base of our tree every holiday season.

Speaking of the McCoy replica, I still cringe a bit whenever I look at it. Sure, I get the gag that the last place Bones would want to be remembered is standing on the transporter pad, but to prevent the strap carrying the doctor's medikit from overlapping his shirt's medical services logo, they didn't move the strap, they moved the symbol!

Whoever made that decision was NOT a Trekkie!

Over the past 15 years, we've gotten miniatures of the captain from each *Trek* "generation" and the ships our heroes (and many baddies) have ridden into science-fiction history. Last year, I got my fondest wish fulfilled when Hallmark finally put out the *Enterprise* A, my all-time favorite starship.

The biggest weakness in the line has to be its sound quality, or lack thereof. Oh, the effects are fine, but whenever someone tries to say anything, it sounds like it was recorded in a deep cave on some distant planet. Surely, they can do better.

But even with this year's upgraded original *Enterprise* and transporter pad with Kirk, Spock and Scotty (the first time he's in an ornament, by the way), Hallmark still has some gaps to fill if our collections are going to be complete.

And I'm still waiting for my second-favorite starship to hit the tree: the Klingon Battle Cruiser from *Classic Trek*. How can you have so many versions of the NCC-1701 and not the ship it most often met in battle?

Still, the high point for Hallmark had to come during the *Voyager* episode "Death Wish," when a member of the Q Continuum tried to escape the best-known Q by turning Janeway's vessel into a Christmas ornament!

Well, let me conclude my columns for this special year by wishing all the members and friends of the U.S.S. *Chesapeake* a merry holiday season, and we'll see you again next year ... in the future! ■

SCIENCE TREK: In the news (and what it means for the future)

There's always something in the news. Recently, it's been you-know-what. In the world of science, there is news as well. Deep-thinking annals and big-name journals aside, here is what I have gathered off CNN.com (and to be fair, Foxnews.com):

- **Scientists: Photos suggest recent water on Mars** <http://www.cnn.com/2006/TECH/space/12/06/mars.water.ap/index.html>

It's like finding a priceless picture in a camera after the photographer's demise. NASA scientists, reviewing a set of images from the Mars Global Surveyor — with which NASA lost contact in early November — found evidence of water on Mars.

The pictures of craters near the Red Planet's North Pole are a follow-up to images the spacecraft snapped three to five years after it arrived at Mars in 1997. They show what may be deposits left by water bursting forth from the sides of several craters. Dubbed by some scientists as a "squirting gun" (insert your own joke here) proving recently liquid water on Mars, others caution that the light-colored flows may only be dust or sand.

(I over-dramatize the "discovery:" The follow-up images are from 2004/5, but are only being published now ... coincidentally after the spacecraft has been lost. Scientific analysis and review in our current times can take years before being announced and even longer before general acceptance.

Research spacecraft like Global Surveyor and its recently arrived companion, Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter, not only provide a glimpse of future generic "sensors," but also give us an opportunity to see them used in ways not originally intended — much like the often modified or recalibrated ship-borne devices on *Trek*. In this case, NASA tried, but failed, to locate Global Surveyor after it fell silent using the more powerful cameras on Reconnaissance Orbiter.)

- **Shuttle launch likelihood still not good, NASA says** <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,235039,00.html>

You wouldn't think it so hard, just like lighting a toy store model rocket and letting it soar above the treeline before parachuting back to the playground. Same concept, just a million times more complicated — far more powerful fuel, a higher objective and, oh yes,

a human crew that must be returned safely.

We've seen twice in the last 20 years failure to achieve that last: the 1986 *Challenger* explosion on take-off and the 2003 *Columbia* disaster returning to Earth. The amount of complicated equipment — and the fact that much of it is state of the art, *circa* 1980 — are key reasons NASA is returning to an "Apollo-type" launch vehicle for future missions to the Moon.

Today, a mission is planned years in advance, with preparation beginning long before the shuttle rolls out to the launch pad. If all has gone well, the shuttle is in orbit now, though the launch window remains open through December 17 ... NASA wants the 12-day mission completed by New Year's because the shuttle's computers may not handle the change to 2008.

(Compare this to *Trek* and other science-fiction shows where our heroes leap into their spaceship and zoom off to the far reaches of the galaxy. Maybe they need a commercial break to prepare or just a scene change, but certainly not months and months — *Deep Space Nine's* "Explorers" excepted.

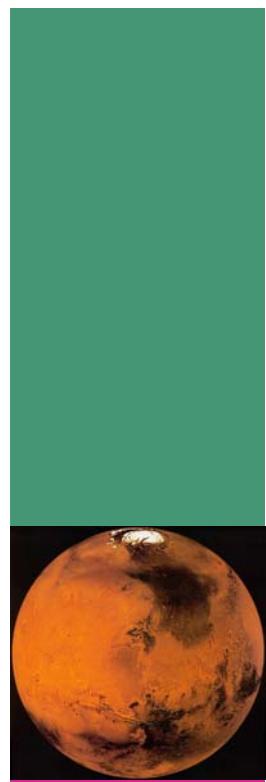
Disasters in space are not a thing of the past, though; spacecraft are a million times more complicated in the fictional future than they are today. It is amazing, I think, that unlike the *Columbia* and countless aircraft crashes, many of the science-fictional space-craft crash-land nearly intact, or at least with the crew surviving. Maybe they are that much better built.)

- **NASA wants permanent moon base** <http://www.cnn.com/2006/TECH/space/12/04/moon.base/index.html>

The first step in many science-fiction stories in humanity's quest for the stars is a moon base. Though we've been through false hopes and plans before, NASA — in response to President Bush's 2004 directive — is shooting for a 2020 return to the moon, with the establishment of a base by 2024, 52 years after a human last set foot on our rocky satellite. Could it really happen this time? Stay tuned...I'll write a follow-up column in 2025.

(Cosmologist and *Star Trek* guest star Stephen Hawking said recently that, to ensure its survival, humanity must colonize other worlds. While acknowledging that faster-

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Is there water on the planet Mars?

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REFLECTIONS: Happy days are here again

'Tis the season to be jolly! You must excuse my departure from the usual no-nonsense sarcastic cynic that is generally me and bear with the vulgar display of crass sentimentality, but I'm actually feeling somewhat festive these days.

This is rare for me because I'm not one who celebrates holidays, and my current attitude is a shock to my own nervous system. My nephew called me and wished me a happy birthday. Now, my nephew is all of 2 years old. I didn't even know he could speak, except for the words "Redskins" and "crap," both of which I taught him. He does know the word "Dallas," but that's usually followed by the word "crap," so I count that as one word. This is what uncles are for.

Upon hearing from this barely loquacious pre-preschooler, I started thinking about other things that happened recently to fill my heart with joy and make me smile.

Way back in April, in this very column, I lamented the fact that a lot of my favorite television shows were not yet on DVD. I was specifically wishing that the Sci Fi show, *First Wave*, would magically appear in stores everywhere in a DVD box set. I said that if *Nowhere Man* (another favorite and prime candidate for the "never appear on a box set" awards) could find itself on DVD, then anything is possible! Little did I realize how prophetic that statement would become!

Even as we "speak," I am mightily resisting the urge to break away from this computer (Yes, I have one! I have three! I don't like them, but I have them! Damn you, Wayne Hall!) and watch the set of *Star Trek: The Animated Series*. This is VERY significant! Having this set means that I have EVERY incarnation of *Star Trek* at my disposal. At my beck and call. To watch at my discretion. MUA HA HA HA HA HA HA!

Any old Trekkie (Yes, I said Trekkie!) would concur as to this most sacred of phenomena, and yes, it is sacred. After years of just re-runs of the original series, it was NEW TREK! New adventures of the *Enterprise*, and they were GOOD! So much unlike the common Saturday morning variety at the time. Saturday mornings used to be a great time for children, full of adventure, education and violence. Now, it had degenerated into wimpy, mind-numbing fodder, culminating

with the Saturday morning crapfest known as *The Smurfs*. A sad time indeed.

But I digress, though not for long. *Star Trek* isn't the only reason for my foray into good times and festive fervor. There is more to me than *Star Trek*; not much more, but there is more. The first season of one of my favorite new shows, *Criminal Minds*, has been released on DVD. A show I thought NO ONE would like, but me. Now, it has become a national treasure, ratings wise, which brings me great worry. I always worry when America likes something I like. Let's face it, the taste of the average American consumer leaves lots to be desired.

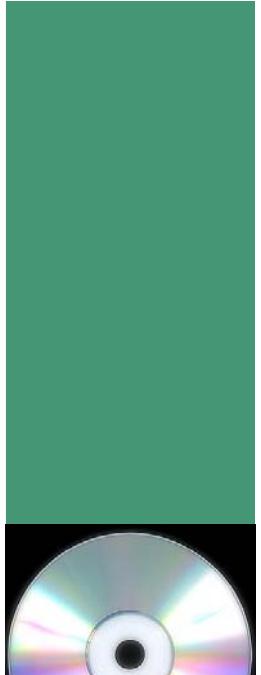
The first season of *Saturday Night Live* has been released, and there is much rejoicing. Some of you are too young to remember, but when this show debuted, it caused a major sensation. It was the only time in the history of America that young America was staying home on a Saturday night, and it was the only hit NBC had for years!

The main reason for my interest is the musical guest segment. Back then, the show stayed away from the chart-topping hit-makers of the time and had more eclectic musical talent, folks you wouldn't hear on the radio and most likely hadn't heard of. Those were great times.

Also, Jack Bauer is back! The fifth season of *24* has been released, the year the show FINALLY got the recognition it deserved. I'm not talking about ratings; the show has always had good ratings, although they are now GREAT ratings, but the number of people watching is not important. This is the year that *24* was finally rewarded by its peers in the industry.

Even though it has received a "Best Drama" nomination all five years of its existence, this season, it finally took home the EMMY, and so did Kiefer Sutherland, who went home with a "Best Actor" award as well. I always knew that one day, or as soon as they canceled *The West Wing*, that *24* would get its EMMY. I never thought Kiefer would win one, though. It was long overdue.

These are all very good reasons for my tidings of comfort and joy, but the box set that really has my boat floating in the about #@\$^ing time release of what I consider the



If *Nowhere Man* could find itself on DVD, then anything's possible.

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WAYNE'S WORLDS: *Heroes*

It's a good time to be a comic book fan. More and more comic books are being adapted for the big and little screens. Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Ghost Rider, the Punisher and some X-Men characters all have motion pictures in the works.

Turn on your television and you can watch *Smallville* and the *Legion of Super-Heroes* cartoon on the CW Network.

However, the most interesting TV series drawing from comics is *Heroes*, which airs on Monday nights on NBC. The subtitle for the program, according to NBC.com, is "Ordinary people discovering extraordinary abilities."

The show draws extended and multiple storyline elements from Fox's 24 while focusing on well-rounded characters, each of which has a different extra-natural ability.

One of the things *Heroes* does best is reveal information slowly, keeping viewers guessing just what is really going on.

Take for example Peter Petrelli, the first person we saw as the premiere episode opened. Peter was having visions of flying and really felt he could do it, and he was tempted as he stood on the roof of a building.

As the show went along, we found out that yes, he could fly, but only when his brother Nathan, who really can fly, was around. Slowly both Peter and the audience discovered that he can mimic the powers of anyone with powers near him.

That was great writing in that now the audience cannot take anything for granted.

Just because it appears that something is true may not make it real at all. And that's just what viewers need — a show that requires us to watch carefully.

The character that appears to be the most popular is the aptly called Hiro, whose name is pronounced much like the show's title.

Hiro, who quotes lines from *Star Trek* a lot, can bend time and distance. When he teleported from Tokyo to New York City, he found himself in the future and observed a terrible disaster, so he returned home to travel back to America with Ando, his English-speaking friend, in tow.

It's Hiro's enthusiasm, his affection for comic books and his desire to be a true hero that make him so appealing. He also has no

problem putting himself in harm's way to save another.

Here are some of the other characters on the show:

- Claire Bennett, the cheerleader from a small town who became the focus of the show's catchline, "Save the cheerleader, save the world." Despite what people on the show said, she's not indestructible. Instead, she has a healing factor, allowing her body to rebuild itself after it's been damaged.

- Claire's adoptive father, Mr. Bennett, referred to as "HRG" for the horn-rimmed glasses he wears. Originally intended to appear only in the pilot, the character has blossomed into someone who may be a true gray area, possibly allied with the darker elements while trying to save his daughter. It's hard to believe that this is Jack Coleman, who used to star on ABC's *Dynasty*.

- Isaac Mendez, who can create paintings that show the future.

- Niki Sanders, who may have the spirit of her dead sister possessing her occasionally, which causes her to black out.

- Micah Sanders, Niki's son, who seems to control electricity and mechanical devices.

- D. L. Sanders, Micah's father, a fugitive from the law who can pass through solid objects or let them go through him.

- Matt Parkman, the married police officer who can read minds. Yes, he's played by J.J. Abrams' buddy, Greg Grunberg.

The "big bad" in the series so far is Sylar, originally someone who made a living repairing watches, but instead wanted to be someone "special." It seems he must eat the brains of those who have powers to be able to make them a part of himself.

Much of the narration during the show is from the perspective of Mohinder Suresh, whose father began to investigate the sudden appearance of paranormal abilities. After the his father's death at the hands of Sylar, Mohinder is conflicted over his role in what is happening on the program.

The multiple storylines are beginning to converge into one, as seen in the recent "fall finale." We saw Peter blowing up while surrounded by many of his powered counterparts in New York City.

The show's creator/Executive Producer
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Some of the cast of the new NBC show *Heroes*.

COMING EVENTS

DECEMBER

December 16 Happy holidays! Let's get together for our yearly Holiday Party and Gift Exchange! Be sure to bring a wrapped gift and the food you agreed to provide for our dinner. For directions, check out the insert in our Yahoo! group!

SCIENCE TREK: In the news ... concluded

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than-light warp drive is impossible — evolving scientific theory on this is a topic for another column — Hawking proposes matter/anti-matter annihilation as the energy source for near-light-speed propulsion that would drive spaceships to our nearest stellar companions in under a decade.

Relativity being what it is, though, from our perspective, a far longer period would have passed.)

Read the rest of the Hawking article at <http://www.cnn.com/2006/TECH/space/11/30/space.hawking.reut/index.html>, and until next month, keep looking up. ■

Second Officer Phil Margolies

REFLECTIONS: Happy days are here again ... concluded

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best-written drama ever on television. *St. Elsewhere* is finally on DVD! My nipples are as hard as rock! I can make holes in donuts without using my hands! I threw away my entire pornography collection, for every time I put a disc in my player, it is sheer orgasmic pleasure!

I believe in miracles! Hey, I even got the entire run of *First Wave* on DVD. It's boot-

leg, but I have it nevertheless! My life is now complete ... wait a minute! There were SIX seasons of *St. Elsewhere*, not to mention three more seasons of *Miami Vice*! When I have them, all my life will be complete.

And speaking of bootlegs, I have the entire two-season run of the Sci Fi Channel's original *The Invisible Man*, but I'll talk about that show next month. ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard

WAYNE'S WORLDS: Heroes ... concluded

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Tim Kring said that he originally expected death to visit the "heroes" much more often than it has, but he found he liked the characters so much, he couldn't kill them as quickly as he originally intended. But recently, we've seen several important passings, including:

- Charlie, the waitress at the Burnt Toast Diner in Texas who could easily remember things and learn languages. We didn't see her very long before she died. This was the first time we actually saw Sylar kill someone.

- Jackie, Claire's cheerleader friend who took the credit when Claire saved a fireman. Sylar thought she was the cheerleader with powers, so he murdered her.

- Eden, who blew her own brains out with a gun in the "fall finale" rather than let Sylar gain her ability to influence others.

And that doesn't begin to cover all the people in *Heroes*. Yes, there's a lot going on, but it's worth the effort to watch carefully.

There are a few questions that need to be

answered on the show, such as:

- Did the "heroes" really "save the cheerleader, save the world?" After all, the girl who was killed by Sylar WAS a cheerleader.

- How did the "heroes" gain their abilities? The show's logo features an eclipse, which may be a clue.

The new catchline for the series is, "Are you on the list?" This apparently refers to a list Mohinder's father had indicating who he discovered had powers.

It's a good show with well-told storylines and interesting characters. If you like that kind of thing (and comics), you might find this program a good thing to add to your Monday television viewing schedule.

The NBC.com website has previous episodes and an online comic book about the show that adds to the series based on the show's *9th Wonder* comic. During the hiatus, fans might want to check it out to hold them over until the show's return on January 22. ■

Chief of Security Wayne Hall



Heroes Executive Producer Tim Kring