

# COMSTAR

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

February, 2007



Gerrold's "Blood and Fire" will finally be made as part of the *New Voyages*.

## ***New Voyages* brings controversial David Gerrold script to life**

While the debate rages on if J.J. Abrams will direct the next *Star Trek* motion picture, fan films about the franchise continue to make real news.

For example, well-known *Star Trek: The Next Generation* director Charles C. Washburn will join the *Star Trek: New Voyages*' growing list of *Trek* alumni as its first assistant director for the production of "Blood and Fire."

Washburn has a long history with *Star Trek*, having worked as the first AD on such landmark *TNG* episodes as "Haven," "Justice," "The Last Outpost" and "The Naked Now."

He will direct the *New Voyages* episode based on David Gerrold's updated script of "Blood and Fire," an idea originally conceived in 1987 when he worked as a writer for *Next Gen* but was deemed at the time as too socially controversial for television.

It is the first script to seriously address the idea of openly gay crew members as part of Starfleet starships. The plot focuses on the effects of an AIDS-like disease as it spreads through the universe.

Supposedly, it was rejected because Starfleet's reaction to the disease did not fit well into Gene Roddenberry's idea of an all-inclusive society. There continues to be debate whether Roddenberry himself may never have actually seen the script for final approval.

Gerrold and Washburn will reportedly work closely together with series creator and executive producer James Cawley to bring this enlightening script to the viewer for the first time, with shooting on the episode to start at the *New Voyages* studio set in upstate New York beginning in June 2007.

Actor Bobby Rice will join the cast of regulars as Captain Kirk's nephew and young Starfleet officer Ensign Peter Kirk.

▲ Patrick Stewart recently said that being cast as Captain Jean-Luc Picard on *TNG* was a "calamity" that disrupted his theatrical career.

Stewart told *The Stage* that he left a production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* to accept the role of Captain Picard on the *Star Trek* sequel series. "I was a different actor ... finally being able to make truth of an emotional commitment to a role like that in such a small, exposing theatre," Stewart said. "The calamity that then happened to me was that I was offered *Star Trek: The Next Generation*."

Though Stewart added that he was "immensely grateful" for some of the positive changes that the series brought (like worldwide recognition and a high-power salary), he said that he has "worked hard not in any sense to feel they were wasted years. There are things I might have done, and I've got to do a lot of them quickly now," he said. ■

## **Let's celebrate our 16th birthday and Farpoint 2007!**

The next meeting of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, February 24, at the Hard Times Cafe located in College Park, Maryland.

We'll gather at 5:00 p.m. for our dinner, followed by our club meeting, which will begin no later than 7:00 p.m. We'll celebrate 16 years as a club, talk about the 2007 Farpoint

and any other recent and upcoming conventions, what fellow club members are up to and the latest news about *Star Trek* and other sci-fi television shows and movies.

Do you need to get directions in order to make it to the February meeting? Then be sure to download this month's insert from our online Yahoo! Group. ■

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## CAPTAIN'S LOG: "The Captaincy"

As I write this, the 2007 Farpoint convention ended just hours ago, and the crew of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake* did another terrific job of providing a track of panels on a wide variety of media science fiction.

We received a healthy round of "apple-sauce" from the Farpoint committee during

its con-ending meeting, so feel free to take a bow, everyone!

One aspect of the convention I found particularly "fascinating" was the track on fan media. I take a certain amount of personal pride in this since

a couple of years ago I moderated a Farpoint panel on fan films set in the Classic *Trek* era.

During that discussion, I was joined by representatives from *New Voyages* and *Starship Exeter*, and I remember the excitement and interest in the room. I'm glad to see that has not only continued, but also grown since then.

This time around, it was fun to mingle with folks from *New Voyages*, including James Cawley, whom I got to tell he's "my second-favorite James Kirk." I don't think he understood what a compliment that was coming from me, but I'm sure you folks do!

Another big moment of the con was the debut of the first "webisode" by the cast and crew of the *Starship Farragut*, a local group of fans who decided to join in the fun and chronicle the adventures of another Federation vessel in Kirk's time.

Entitled "The Captaincy," the story follows James T. Carter during his first mission as captain of the *U.S.S. Farragut*, the ship on which a certain James T. Kirk served before he moved on to the *Enterprise*.

Before Carter can settle in, he and his crew are sent to investigate the disappearance of a frigate and a survey team from a distant planet. They find a pre-Rev. Jim Commander Kruge and a group of Klingons developing a new "superweapon" for use against Starfleet.

With that in mind, let me put on my Clint Eastwood cowboy hat and give you my review.

*The good:* There are plenty of good things to say about "The Captaincy," which is an excellent first episode by the *Farragut* folks.

All the sets, props and costumes were terrific. I don't know how much of this was due

to cooperation from the *New Voyages* gang, but it definitely looked great!

The special effects were on the money, too. Everything from the *Farragut* in drydock at the beginning to the encounter with the Klingons' superweapon at the end looked sharp.

I also liked the characters, from Carter to feisty female Chief Engineer Michelle Smithfield. My favorite right out of the gate, though, was by-the-book Security Chief Henry Prescott III, who was in charge of security when his previous captain was taken out of action and is doggedly determined not to let that happen ever again.

*The bad:* As with most fan productions, the weakest part of the whole affair was the script. Don't get me wrong; there were lots of terrific moments during the episode, which was based on a story idea from Jack Broughton (who plays Captain Carter) and written by Paul Sieber (Chief Prescott).

I understand the need to provide background on the characters and their relationships, but I felt that too much of this was done while the landing party was walking through the woods on the planet. And walking through the woods. And walking through the woods some more.

At another point, First Officer Robert "RT" Tacket and a wounded security officer were being fired on by some nearby Klingons. We cut away for a while, and when we came back, everyone was still in the exact same positions they were when we left! Some folks giggled a bit at this during the showing, and I was among them.

*The ugly:* The strongest criticism I have of the episode was that the security chief almost stole the show, even though it was entitled "The Captaincy." Again, he was the most original person in the crew to me, and that certainly made him stand out.

On the other hand, I understand that his development from major irritant to the captain's friend was part of the story's examination of Carter.

Still, if that's the worst thing I can say about a first effort by a fan group – most of which never see their projects through to completion – then I can happily say I'm looking forward to the *Farragut*'s next episode, which should arrive later this year! ■

Captain Randy Hall



The *Farragut* crew has appeared in their first episode.

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# SCIENCE *TREK*: Or maybe not

Columbus and crew set out to find a western passage to India and instead ran into an “undiscovered” continent or two in the way. Despite being stopped thousands of miles from their destination, those sailors still found Indians — American Indians. Ironic, huh? I know. That’s my point.

Okay, if you’re still going “huh” or starting to flip to Refractions or whatever it’s called, the point is you can tend to find what you’re looking for. If you’re looking for aliens to be totally different from us, you’ll find all the reasons why they absolutely positively can not be anything like us.

As that columnist on the next page is so fond of pointing out, the putty-nosed humanoid aliens of *Trek* might not just be figments of Hollywood’s collective imagination ... they might represent what’s or who’s actually out there. That is, those million scientists might be wrong (okay, it’s really 864,213, but I rounded up), and PBS agrees with him.

Or rather, a particular show I saw on PBS a few months ago presented the argument that the requirements for intelligent life not only made the humanoid form as developed on Earth possible, but also as likely to evolve elsewhere. That maybe the Cardassians and the Klingons are, like the truth, out there.

Let’s resurrect that old COMSTAR classic, “Point, Counterpoint” to answer the questions we raised last month:

First, let’s add a new one—*What is life?*

## Point

Life is commonly defined as an organism that undergoes metabolism, possesses a capacity to grow, responds to stimuli, reproduces and through natural selection adapts to its environment in succeeding generations.

## Counterpoint

It’s easy to define life as we know it because, well, we know it — or think we do. Yet, if we were to find organisms that appear to be alive but don’t meet these criteria or others, perhaps we’ll have to redefine what life is. Science fiction is littered with sentient computers and all. Or as I like to say, another beautiful theory shot down by ugly fact.

*Could the conditions on other worlds so exactly match ours that intelligent humanoid life is inevitable?*

## Point

In a universe this large, sure random

chance means another world might come close, but to match ours exactly is not very likely. There were (and still are) so many factors involved in the course of evolution — geophysical and biological — of Earth that it would be difficult to find another within a reasonable proximity, say, 100 light years.

## Counterpoint

Close might not just count in horse shoes, hand grenades and nuclear weapons. Earth met a set of conditions — distance from its parent star, type of parent star, planet size, moon, etc. — that aided the development of life, which became intelligent life, not just in humanoid form, but some suppose in dolphinic form as well. The conditions on another world may not have to match ours exactly for intelligent life, even humanoid life, to develop. We don’t know the range of conditions truly required, just what we’ve observed here and theorized.

*The currently theoretical question put another way, what conditions on other worlds might drive the evolution of non-humanoid life, intelligent or not?*

## Point

Why, the same conditions that drove it here. After all, there is evidence that other species are intelligent: dolphins, octopi (opening those jars and all) and dogs. There is a difference between intelligence and sentience. From what we’ve theorized with our intelligence, there are some basic requirements for life: water (specifically salt water), heat, carbon, a “food” source (something to power cellular factories — doesn’t have to be filet mignon).

## Counterpoint

Again, the conditions don’t have to be the same; they just have to be capable of producing and supporting life. On Earth, as pointed out last month, there are known life forms on Earth which do not need oxygen or sunlight to survive — in fact, it may be deadly to them! On Earth, we’ve found life thriving around caustic sea vents on the ocean floor and miles below the surface in Antarctica. Granted, life may have the same needs (e.g. cellular sustenance), but the methods of supplying those needs could be different.

Think about a world where the Horta (“Devil in the Dark”) could survive and thrive ... would we be able to even breathe the air?

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Spock connects with the Horta from *Star Trek*'s “Devil in the Dark.”

**ART CREDITS:**  
newvoyages.com 1  
starshipfarragut.com 2  
images.google.com 3,  
Insert back  
scifi.com 4, 5, 6,  
Insert front



## REFLECTIONS: Disappearing act

“A schmuck named Nietzsche once wrote, ‘Anything done out of love is beyond good and evil.’”—My favorite quote from Darien Fawkes

For all of its cliched trappings and trite beginnings, *The Invisible Man* had one of the most unique takes on plotting and the most original slant on humor I’ve ever seen in television.

There were some nights when you couldn’t tell whether the show was comedy, science fiction, action and adventure, or drama. On the best nights, it was all four, and that made it a show close to my heart. Because of its fluctuation in storytelling, I could never guess where any given episode was going.

For me, that’s a most welcome relief.

When the USA Network approached Matt Greenberg (then best known as the writer of *Halloween H20*) to create a new TV series based on the classic *Invisible Man* story, he wasn’t very interested.

“When my agent asked if I wanted to take this meeting, I was ready to say: ‘Screw it; I can’t come up with anything really interesting.’ But then, I had this weird brain flash and started getting excited about the idea. I didn’t want to do invisibility the way it had been done before, such as bleach infected into the skin or weird radiation. One of my favorite movies was *Predator* — I loved the way the creature in that became invisible by bending light.

“I thought, ‘Why can’t we do invisibility in an organic way?’ and that’s when I came up with the idea of Quicksilver and giving a guy a synthetic gland. Once I had that concept, I thought we could do it as a subversive satire, taking some of the cliches of SF and turning them on their ear. At that point, it suddenly became interesting to me.”

Thus, the realization of Greenberg’s vision is obvious. The eponymous invisible man is Darien Fawkes, erstwhile burglar, now human experiment. As a thief, Fawkes made a good dentist. Not that he was bad at stealing things; he wasn’t. But his heart would never allow him to go too far, a trait any GOOD criminal needs to get ahead in the world of crime. (No, you DON’T want to know how I know this.)

The reason he was in prison when the government came looking for him was because of his heart or sense of decency or stupidity,

depending on how you look at it. He had successfully entered a penthouse to rob from its owner. He found the safe hidden behind a picture of Ronald Reagan and managed to open it without a problem. The trouble arose when it turned out that the owner was home. Surprised by the perp, he succumbed to a heart attack.

Now, Darien could have grabbed what he came for and run, but he couldn’t leave the man in duress. So he performed CPR on the elderly gentleman and was caught lying on top of him. Of course, the man chose that moment to regain consciousness. Darien was charged with burglary, attempted murder — and sexual assault. The age-old proverb “No good deed goes unpunished” clearly applies to this situation.

Even in a world where nothing seemed to go his way, he always had one fallback: his brother, Kevin. His brother loved him and always tried to be there for him and help him when he needed it. Or was he? You see, it was his brother, the genius, who discovered the Quicksilver gland and proposed that he install it in Darien to get him out of jail.

One wonders if he didn’t take advantage of Darien’s situation to procure a human guinea pig to complete his experiment. This is something I’ve always wondered about. Was it love or convenience that moved his brother to approach Darien with this “way out of jail?”

There was also the question of whom to trust. This item had the potential to be very dangerous in the wrong hands, a point Darien brought up to Kevin. Kevin told him he wanted it in someone he could trust. He knew Darien’s heart was in the right place.

I still wonder if his was. Kevin Fawkes invented the Quicksilver gland, a synthetic gland that secretes a substance that does not reflect light. Since Quicksilver does not reflect light, the human eye cannot see it. Since the light is not reflected, it goes around it, giving the illusion of transparency.

Next month: Fawkes’ cohorts. ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard



Darien Fawkes as  
*The Invisible Man*.

## WAYNE'S WORLDS: *The Dresden Files*

Magic. It's a difficult thing to manage ... especially if one is a writer.

One of the great escapes a writer uses to get out of a corner he or she finds himself or herself painted in is what some of us call the "woo woo ray." It's that mystical device or force that comes out of nowhere to solve the problem and propel the plot forward.

Magic is often used as a "woo woo ray." Stories about wizards and witches and magic often get to the climax only to find that there has been no foreshadowing of what the solution will be. Then, when we are wondering how in the world the main character will solve the problem, the writer uses the "woo woo ray" — something never before seen in the universe the characters live in. Talk about disappointing! It can ruin the whole experience.

Recently, something that has hit the public and has helped make magic more acceptable has been the *Harry Potter* series of books and movies. Often, the "woo woo ray" is not used, and we get satisfying stories and characterizations. I happen to enjoy both the novels and the films myself.

If you like *Potter*, I think you'll also like *The Dresden Files*.

What attracted the books to my attention was that the Sci Fi Channel was about to air an ongoing television series based loosely on the eight books in the series.

Right now, I'm nearly through the fifth book, and I do enjoy them. I find them similar to *Potter* in tone and in pacing. They are a quick read.

There is a difference or two between *Potter* and *Dresden*. For example, four-letter words appear in *Dresden*. The books are also a lot more "adult" (in the good way) than *Potter*.

In fact, I often think that Harry Dresden is close to what a grown-up Harry Potter would be like. Sort of.

The series debuted in January on the Sci Fi Channel, and the ratings have been pretty good so far.

As a long-time *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* fan, I'm always interested in shows that alumni from the series are involved with. *Dresden* has two such folks in charge — Hans Beimler and Robert Hewitt Wolfe.

Though Dresden author Jim Butcher doesn't have creative control of the series, he does give input and has stated that he's pretty

happy with how the show has been set up and done. Of course, whenever a book is translated into something for the small or large screen, changes will happen, and *Dresden* is no exception. For example, in the books, Harry drives an old Volkswagen he calls the "Blue Beetle" after a DC Comics character. On the show, he drives a Jeep. Also, Harry's office is located in the basement of a building in the novels. On the series, it's on the first floor so clients and friends can easily burst in on Harry for dramatic effect. And Harry now carries a hockey stick instead of a blasting rod. Well, Chicago *is* a hockey town, after all.

Probably the biggest change was portraying Bob, the talking skull, as a person who walks around when he interacts with Harry. The producers tried keeping Bob as a skull with glowing orange eyes, but they didn't feel that it worked on the screen, so Terrence Mann gets to talk but not touch Harry.

There was a lot of speculation that former *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* star James Marsters, who played Spike, would take the lead role since he had performed audio versions of several of the books. In a way, I'm glad he chose not to do it (one factor that prevented him was having to move to Canada to film).

To me, Paul Blackthorne is a great choice for Harry Dresden. Visually, he is very close to how I pictured Harry to be. I think his voice is a good match as well since Harry does quite a lot of narration in the books as well.

Lieutenant Connie Murphy ("Murph") is another matter. On the screen, she's a tall, dark-haired Hispanic, which is quite different from the shorter, blonde version in the books. The police connection for Dresden had to be changed, according to sources, because there really is a Lieutenant Connie Murphy who looks like what Butcher describes in the Chicago Police Department. To be sure they could still use the name, it is rumored that they had to make her look very, *very* different, which they have. And I like how Valerie Cruz is handling the character. It's just quite a shock to see her appear so unlike the woman in the series of books.

Several of the episodes have aired, and the storylines have differed significantly from the novels. That makes sense since it's tough

*continued on page 6*



The Dresden Files has fans wild about Harry.

# COMING EVENTS

## FEBRUARY

*February 24* ..... Happy birthday, U.S.S. *Chesapeake*! We'll celebrate another year of fun and frivolity and discuss the recent Farpoint convention at the Hard Times Cafe in College Park, Maryland. We'll meet at 5 p.m. for dinner, then the meeting will begin no later than 7 p.m. For directions, check out the insert in our Yahoo! group!

## SCIENCE TREK: Or maybe not ... concluded

*Continued from page 3*

### Point

Could the Horta even exist in this universe? Silicon-based (as opposed to carbon-based) is theoretically possible, but unlikely. Though scientists have been considering the possibility at least 115 years, they've found no evidence of silicon-based life, even in meteorites or comets, nor even the building blocks of such life in the stars and interstellar medium. Carbon bonds far more readily and with functional "handedness" than silicon, and so far, that's all we've found as the basis of life.

### Counterpoint

You didn't answer the question. Besides, "so far" doesn't mean we couldn't find it in the future. A world with silicon-based life may mean a world where carbon is not so plentiful, and silicon-based forms won the early evolutionary battles. One problem, though, is the by-product of silicon-oxygen reaction (comparable to our carbon-oxygen one). Oxidized carbon yields carbon dioxide, which we exhale, but oxidized silicon leads to a solid, silicon dioxide. Try exhaling that. Again, just because we don't know a mecha-

nism doesn't mean it's not possible. It just might turn out if we can show, even theoretically, how the Horta could evolve, we may not be able to survive on our own there.

Just some points and counterpoints to consider. Something you can do because you are both intelligent and sentient.

Here's a question for another column (not next month, don't worry): Just because life forms may be physically similar, does that mean they are necessarily similar in other ways? Thought processes or cultural mores, for instance? ■

### Web Notes:

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/> (It means more than "it doesn't go.");
- [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/archive/int\\_spac.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/archive/int_spac.html) (Space, the Public Frontier);
- <http://www.pbs.org/kcet/closetotruth/explore/index.html> (Getting close ... .);
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life> (Gotta have a wiki.); and
- <http://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/S/siliconlife.html> (That's silicon, not Silly Con.)

*Second Officer Phil Margolies*

## WAYNE'S WORLDS: *The Dresden Files* ... concluded

*Continued from page 5*

to cram a 350-page story into an hour-long television show.

Some of the standard happenings in the books have been appearing in the series, such as Harry getting pounded into the pavement on a regular basis. Also, Harry is often truly outclassed when he fights the supernatural baddies, which forces him to rely on his wits, something I like to see in a character. Since Harry has to struggle, we can relate to him, and that's always good for a fictional person.

The plots have been somewhat close to what we've seen in the books, but not exact, although the first novel, *Storm Front*, will be translated very soon into an episode.

There have been criticisms that the show doesn't highlight Chicago enough. I can see that doing more of that would help give the series a unique touch since most television shows are based in either Los Angeles or New York City, but so far, they've been focusing on getting us familiar with the characters.

The best thing about the show is that they work hard not to use the "woo woo ray." We often learn about what Harry can do before he does it, which makes the show much more enjoyable, in my opinion.

If you like *Harry Potter* and would like more magic in your television viewing, I recommend you give *The Dresden Files* a try. ■

*Chief of Security Wayne Hall*



The cast of *The Dresden Files*.