

COMSTAR

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

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The *U.S.S. Enterprise* hauled in big bucks for Paramount in its opening weekend.

Trek XI hits theaters at warp speed, earning \$76.5 million

Paramount's *Star Trek* successfully left space dock to gross \$76.5 million in its domestic box office debut, according to the *Variety* website.

J. J. Abrams' reboot of the classic sci-fi franchise came in on the upper end of expectations. Paramount has already green-lit a second movie.

Star Trek took a bite out of 20th Century Fox holdover *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, which debuted by earning \$87 million last weekend, the best opening of the year.

Wolverine fell a steep 68 percent in its second weekend to \$27 million for a 10-day domestic total of \$129.6 million.

Star Trek made more on Friday (\$26.8 million, per Exhibitor Relations) than nine of the 10 previous *Trek* movies made in their respective opening weekends. It made more in 72 hours than 2002's *Star Trek: Nemesis*, the last pre-Abrams film, made in 91 days of release (\$43.3 million).

Star Trek also led another "up" weekend at the domestic box office, with revenues running as much as 22 percent over the same weekend last year.

Star Trek had no problem playing beyond its core Trekkie crowd Friday as the picture raked in an estimated \$31 million, giving Paramount its second-highest opening day ever at the box office for a live-action film.

Playing at 3,849 theaters, *Star Trek* ranked behind the first day gross of Paramount's *Iron Man*, which made \$38.7 million last May. Included in that figure was \$7 million of Thursday evening and midnight runs.

Reboots have become a blockbuster trend for the major studios looking to rebrand their picture franchises for a new generation of moviegoers.

This includes MGM-Sony's gritty take on James Bond with *Casino Royale* (first day \$14.7 million) and Warner Bros.' dramatic rendering of Batman in *Batman Begins* (opening day \$15.1 million).

Among the first installments for these franchise reboots, the first Friday for *Star Trek* is arguably the biggest haul.

The film's foreign launch beamed up a solid \$35.5 million in 54 markets. ■

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You "may" want to get to this month's meeting

The next meeting of the *U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek* and Science-Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, May 16, at the Hard Times Cafe located in College Park, Maryland.

We'll get together to order dinner at 5:00 p.m. Our club meeting will start no later than 7:00 p.m.

During this month's meeting, we'll talk about what fellow club members have been up to and discuss the latest *Star Trek* movie and other sci-fi television shows and feature films.

Need directions to this month's meeting? Get this month's Insert, which is in our Yahoo! Group. ■

CAPTAIN'S LOG: The new Bennett or Braga?

While waiting for *Star Trek XI* to hit theaters, our favorite franchise was at one of its many turning points.

As producer of the first *Trek* in several years, would J.J. Abrams revitalize the series like Harve Bennett did with *The Wrath of Khan*, or would he be the new Brannon Braga, who had a part in the ridiculous death of Kirk in *Generations*? Or would things fall somewhere in between?

Let me state two things: If you don't want to be spoiled about the movie, go to the next column and come back after you've seen *Trek XI*, and if you *really* want to enjoy the film, read the *Star Trek: Countdown* comic book trade paperback (scripted by the film's two writers).

The movie began with the arrival of a Romulan ship from the post-*Nemesis* era into a time just before Classic *Trek*. The captain of the starship was Nero, who intended to wipe out the Federation to prevent his planet from being destroyed in the future.

Opposing him was the brand new (and very cool) *Enterprise*, which included the brash young Kirk and Spock, who was torn between his human half and his Vulcan side.

The good. There's a LOT to enjoy in the film, which was obviously geared toward a new "generation" of young Trekkies.

The concept of recasting the cultural icons from *Star Trek* was definitely a risky move on Abrams' part. The characters had to be close to the originals, but not so close that they would be seen as imitators of the original crew.

Nevertheless, Zachary Quinto was so close to Spock that it got pretty eerie at times.

Christopher Pine was good as Kirk, who had to overcome his rage over the death of his father at the hands of Nero at the start of the movie. The second time I saw the film, a tear trickled down my face for George Kirk, who saved thousands of lives in about 10 seconds while James Tiberius Kirk was born on a shuttle fleeing the menace that looked like a large electric

storm in space.

Still, that early loss left Kirk with almost uncontrollable rage. He tended to drive cars over cliffs and start fights at bars where Starfleet folks hung out, especially one cadet Kirk nicknamed "Cupcake."

Bruce Greenwood (who was terrific in the UPN series *Nowhere Man*) took on a fatherly role by challenging Kirk to be even better than his dad. While being shuttled to the *Enterprise* (which is a beautiful effect, by the way), James T. met Leonard McCoy, and the two became fast friends.

One of the most hilarious parts of the movie was Kirk taking the Kobayashi Maru test for the third time, which led to a confrontation with the person who created the exercise. (Here's a big hint: He never took the test until *The Wrath of Khan*.)

As usual, Starfleet ships were spread too thin to respond to the return of the Romulan wessel—uh, vessel as it attacked Vulcan. Most of the cadets were quickly pressed into service.

When he heard that the starship was headed toward "an electric storm in space," Kirk warned Pike that they were heading into the same trap that killed his father 25 years earlier.

The *Enterprise* held back and then dropped out of warp speed into a Wolf 357-like cloud of debris from destroyed starships.

Nero then hailed the *Enterprise* and "invited" Pike to shuttle over to his vessel. Before he left the ship, the captain told Kirk, Sulu and a guy in a red shirt to destroy the device the Romulans were using to reach the planet's core.

When Spock learned that Nero was attacking his world with something called "red matter," which created a singularity to destroy a planet from within, the science officer transported down to the planet and tried to rescue as many people as he could. The situation became tragic when Spock watched his mother fall to her death as he

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J.J. Abrams, producer of the newest *Star Trek* film.

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Check out our club website: www.usschesapeake.org

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SCIENCE *TREK*: Lipstick or not, don't kiss that pig

If you haven't seen the new *Star Trek* movie, don't worry. I'm not delving into it until next month. This time around, we'll talk about the other big story of the day: swine flu. (Don't worry, you can't catch it by reading this column.)

The so-called swine flu is BIG news these days. This nascent strain of influenza, which goes these days by the much sexier and scientific moniker H1N1, has captured its place on the news.

It seems that every five minutes each morning, I'm seeing a "Breaking News: Swine Flu Fears" report on Channel 5 telling us that ONE MORE PERSON may have SWINE FLU! (I'll save further discussion of the media for a future column on human psychology). Does H1N1 deserve such BIG attention?

To investigate this potentially BIG problem, we're going to get small; as in *Deep Space Nine's* "One Little Ship" and *Fantastic Voyage*, small as we delve into the nano-size world of viruses. How small are we getting? The eponymous human hair is about two millimeters thick. The familiar *E. Coli* bacteria is 1,000 times smaller, about two micrometers. Viruses are about 100 times smaller than *that*, about 20 nanometers in size.

What is a virus?

Although viruses have likely been infecting other life forms on Earth for millions if not billions of years, we humans only found them about 110 years ago.

Now, we know of 5,000 other types. They infect everyone and everything (including bacteria!) and are found everywhere on Earth. And they're simple. Dead simple. (Cue scary music.)

The human genome contains an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 genes, with current research pointing toward the lower end of the range. The *Caenorhab-*

ditis elegans worm has between 10,000 and 20,000 genes (with current research indicating the higher number). The *E. Coli* bacteria contains about 4,000 to 5,000 genes.

Viruses contain between about 10 and 1,500 genes. (Some viruses contain DNA strands while others carry RNA strands. And it gets even more complicated than I can cover today.)

Unlike a bacteria, which is the equivalent of a full-stocked space ship that attacks planets, a virus is a far smaller raider that can only perpetuate its crew by invading everyone and anyone else. (I mean, doesn't a bacteriophage look like a landing craft?)

What is H1N1?

H1N1 aka swine flu is a strain (aka mutation) of the common influenza virus (aka "the flu"). It isn't new, it just has not been common (typically one or two cases a year, but 12 cases have been reported in the United States in the past three years before this recent outbreak). Its origin, of course, is a strain of influenza that infects swine aka pigs. The most common forms of swine flu are H1N1, H1N2, H3N2, and H3N1.

So what happened? Virus sex parties, that's what. Very simply, a crew of viruses from different lines (swine flu, bird flu, people flu, for instance) happen to meet in a pig (let's call him "Wilbur"). They start, um, swapping genes (highly personal virus behavior). After the, um, swap, the viruses (or rather their descendants) take their leave of "Wilbur" and go in search of other hosts to, um, infect. Other hosts, like YOU and ME!

Why should we be worried?

The current variant of swine flu is highly contagious. It can be transmitted from pig to person (most likely by breathing in the viruses; you eat an infected pig

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ART CREDITS:
startrekmovie.com
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images.google.com
2, 3, 4

REFLECTIONS: A Wolfe in Gene's clothing

"The main emphasis in the first bunch of episodes is all these characters getting to know each other, and Dylan getting to know the world he's finding himself in." Robert Hewitt Wolfe relayed: "It's setting forth the parameters for what the mission is going to be and pursuing it."

Wolfe was true to his word. We've all felt the pain, frustration and trepidations of learning to trust new people. Dylan was definitely a fish out of water, and for a man who's used to being in charge and on top of things, this was a huge and bitter pill to swallow.

We bonded and he bonded. We discovered as he discovered, and the show was all the better for it. The characters were both original and well conceived. It didn't take either Dylan or the viewing audience long to connect, and that's a rarity in television.

First Officer Rebecca "Becka" Valentine (Lisa Ryder) was a freighter captain of the good ship *Eureka Maru*. Although relatively young, she was a seasoned veteran of space travel and actually had more time under her belt being captain than Dylan. A headstrong, no-nonsense cargo ship skipper (and smuggler) who was very protective of her crew and had little to no respect for rules and formal regulations. She had a shady past and inherited an equally shady family business. Her business and her ship were given to her by her father.

Weapons Officer Tyr Anasazi out of Victoria by Barbarossa (Keith Hamilton Cobb), a Nietzschean of the nearly extinct Kodiak Pride. He was selfish, smart and always one step ahead of his contemporaries (except Dylan),

Tyr always plotted his actions carefully. The only person he was completely loyal to was himself. These were all common traits amongst the Nietzschean race, a genetically engineered off-shoot of humans. Tyr remained on the *Andromeda* because he recognized the ship's superior

firepower and figured if Dylan didn't make it back alive from a mission, the ship would be his. Tyr was probably the breakout character of the show.

Seamus Zelazny Harper (Gordon Michael Woolvett) was a genius engineer and computer hacker. Good natured, but often egocentric and childish, Harper had an insane sense of humor and was the only person aboard the ship who seemed to know how to have a good time. He hated most Nietzscheans (They betrayed the Commonwealth and took over Earth.) and Magog (They ate Earth, but more on them later) with a passion. Brilliant, carefree and living *la vida loca*, Harper was the only member of the crew from Earth.

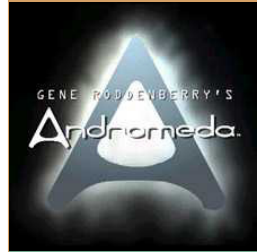
Science Officer Reverend Behemial or "Rev Bem" (Brent Stait) was an unusually intelligent member of the Magog, a race of savage, flesh-eating killers who sustained themselves on fresh meat and laid their eggs inside their prey, who eat their way out once they hatched.

Though born a cannibal, Rev had cast aside his savage heritage and became a monk in a religion called Wayism, a belief of complete pacifism. Rejecting violence and all harm to all living thing, Rev Bem often served as counselor for the crew as well. His name, Behemial, translates as "Red Plague" in English.

Andromeda/Rommie (Lexa Doig), ship AI (artificial intelligence) and AI's android avatar. Andromeda was the artificial intelligence that controlled the ship, numerous robots and androids and could replace most of the crew when needed. She could appear as a human-like woman on any display or as a hologram.

The android extension of *Andromeda*. Rommie was more emotional and was capable of expressing those emotions clearly. Built by Harper to serve the crew and the ship, as well as live out his perverted but unfounded desires. AIs were known to fall in love with their captains,

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CAPTAIN'S LOG: Bennett or Braga? (continued)

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and the others beamed out.

With the destruction of Vulcan still fresh in his mind, Spock had Kirk (as argumentative as ever) put in an escape pod and dropped onto Delta Vega, a planet that was incredibly cold but still had some big creepy-crawlies that tried to see what “Kirk stew” would taste like.

In an emotional but improbable twist, Kirk was rescued by the older Spock (Leonard Nimoy in the ears for the first time in about 15 years), who was left there to helplessly watch the end of his planet. And Vulcan was destroyed despite the best efforts of the crew of the *Enterprise*.

While at the Starfleet base on Delta Vega, Kirk and the older Spock encountered Montgomery Scott with a little alien as his only companion. Using Spock's knowledge, the group transported to the *Enterprise*.

In a page right out of “This Side of Paradise,” Kirk used Spock's festering anger over the destruction of his planet to make him lose his temper, and Spock admitted he had been “emotionally compromised.” That left Kirk to sit in the center seat in command for the first time.

The *Enterprise* managed to beat the Romulans to Earth, and Kirk and Spock were beamed onto the enemy vessel. Again, lots of fighting, kicking and space battles until Pike was freed and the remaining Romulans were sucked into the red matter they'd intended to use to destroy Earth. (But they could come back someday.)

In the end, Kirk was made captain of the *Enterprise* and relieved Pike (who, eerily enough, was in a wheelchair for the ceremony). The ship and its crew warped off into another movie, I suspect.

The bad. Right off the bat, it annoyed me when Chekov and Scotty mangled their dialogue with accents even the ship's computer couldn't understand.

Uhura had a different role in this film than in the past. She seemed to be the

ship's “morale officer,” if you know what I mean. She took it upon herself to raise other crewmen's morale, even Spock! That flew in the face of Uhura's disgust with her fellow officer in “The Man Trap” after he failed to react to the news that a member of a landing party had been killed.

Another annoying thing was Abrams' apparent decision that Kirk would hit on any female who passed by. Sigh. I remember from Classic *Trek* that if a guy got between the captain and his starship, Kirk would hit him. With women, the captain took a kinder, gentler approach. But if that didn't work, he'd hit her. Now that's what I call treating everyone equally!

Also baffling was the idea that Nero and his ship would pop out of a black hole-type warp, destroy a nearby Federation vessel, and then sit around for 25 years waiting for Spock to emerge from the same phenomenon. I thought he could easily have taken over Romulus with all the advanced weaponry on the ship and keep the future disaster from happening that way. I guess this festering rage stuff can really be a downer when it comes to strategy.

Finally, folks in the movie sure got promoted fast. Kirk was in the academy when the story started, and by the end was given the rank of captain. I've heard of field promotions, but I would have ended the film with McCoy and Kirk leaving the *Enterprise* in a shuttle. McCoy would ask, “So do think we'll ever go back to that ship?” Kirk would look through the window which would have a reflection of the starship and say, “I think we'll see her again.”

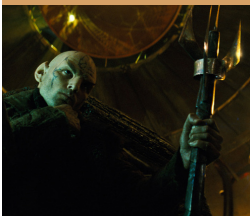
The ugly. I've never understood why people would take on a project and start off by wiping out all that went before. I realize that *Trek's* continuity is massive, but if you want to play in someone's sandbox, you ought to play by their rules. *Deep Space Nine* actually made continuity a positive thing rather than a hurdle.

Anyway, even before opening weekend,
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Most of the “re-imagined” crew of the Starship *Enterprise*

Wayne Hall's "Wayne's Worlds" will return next month.



Nero is stalking Spock in the new Star Trek film.

COMING EVENTS

MAY

May 16 What did you think of the new *Star Trek* movie? Let's get together and talk about it during our May meeting! We'll gather at the Hard Times Cafe in College Park, Maryland, at 5 to order our dinner, followed by our monthly meeting starting no later than 7 p.m. We'll also find out the latest news from our club members.

CAPTAIN'S LOG: The new Bennett or Braga? (concluded)

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Paramount gave its approval for another *Trek* movie from Abrams and company.

As for the question I started out with, it's pretty easy to see I consider Abrams to be the new Bennett. As far as I'm

concerned, Braga and his friends should continue working on *24* until some alien with a funny forehead tries to take on Jack Bauer.

Rating: ▲ ▲ ▲-1/2. ■

Captain Randy Hall

SCIENCE TREK: Lipstick or not, don't kiss ... (concluded)

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and your body's gastric defenses may take better care of protecting you than your respiratory system does). It is also resistant to two of the four licensed anti-viral drugs.

So far, the current outbreak of H1N1 Type A Influenza has not proven more deadly than other, more common strains, but you never know. (Cue scary music.)

So how do we fight these guys?

That's the easy part; we make a vaccine. Now that's a complicated process, but really all we have to do is ... I don't feel so well. Excuse m ... ■

Second Officer Phil Margolies

Web Notes:

- <http://www.cellsalive.com/howbig.htm> (The incredibly shrinking animation.),
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virus> (Can I Wiki "Wiki-addiction"?),
- http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/faq/genenumber.shtml (Can you count that high?),
- <http://genomebiology.com/2001/2/11/comment/2008> (What does a worm need with 20,000 genes?),
- <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> (Control diseases? You can't control diseases!), and
- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/about_disease/en/index.html (We're all one big happy world now.)

REFLECTIONS: A Wolf in Gene's clothing (concluded)

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and Rommie was no exception.

Trance Gemini took care of all things growing, medical and medicinal. Her origin and history were clouded in secrecy in the show's beginning, but were revealed in the fifth and last season.

It was quite obvious from the start that Trance was much more than a sympathetic doctor. She had the ability to foresee all possible futures at once, an

ability that could or could not come in handy. I hesitate to reveal the "mystery" of the character, lest there be someone out there who has not watched the show and plans on doing so, but I will say that it was one of the show's most satisfying revelations.

What's that, you say? I didn't elaborate on Captain Dylan Hunt? You'll just have to wait until next month. ■

Conn Officer Lorenzo Heard