

COMSTAR

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

FEBRUARY, 2011



Officer's Log: Turning 20

Happy birthday to the U.S.S. Chesapeake! Long may she sail!

Was it really two decades ago that Randy and I were handed a flyer at a local theater about some clue we'd never heard of before when we took our mother to see *Star Trek VI*?

We went to the next meeting, not knowing what lay ahead. Little did we know how much it would change our lives.

Since then, as a club, we've performed award-winning skits, conducted panel discussions on a wide range of topics, walked across the Bay Bridge, seen several members get married (and some even get divorced), travelled everywhere from California to New York City, met stars and celebrities of all kinds, and produced literally hundreds of newsletters, bookmarks and flyers.

We've seen so many other local clubs rise up and then vanish over the years. I'm always surprised when I don't see them

around anymore, and sad when some of those folks have passed. After all, we all share a love of science fiction, and we can never have too many fellow fans around.

Why did we do all this? Because we *wanted* to, not because it earned us points with some national organization, not be-

cause someone told us to, and not for any other reason except that we enjoyed them. I'm always surprised when people recognize me and other club members because we don't do it for any kind of fame or recognition. We do it because we love what we do.

That's why I think the club will be around for many more years to come. Even though many of us are getting grayer in the upper regions, we still love what we do at cons, at club meetings, and at other away team missions.

And that's something worth living for, worth doing for as long as we can. ■

Chief of Security Wayne Hall



20 Years So Soon? Theta Wasn't Even Born Yet 20 Years Ago!

The next monthly meeting of the U.S.S. Chesapeake Star Trek and Science Fiction Club will be held on Saturday, February 12, at the Hard Times Café in College Park, Maryland.

We'll start the stuffing our faces about 5:00 p.m., then talk with our mouths full

about 7:00 p.m.

During this month's meeting, we'll talk about what fellow club members have been up to and catch up on the latest sci-fi television shows and feature films. For directions to this month's meeting, get the latest insert. ■

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CAPTAIN'S LOG: Return to Tomorrow

Can you believe it? Twenty years of fun, fandom and frivolity, and we're still going strong!

During the past two decades, some people have joined our little group while others have departed for one reason or another.

I could rattle off story after story of the good times we've enjoyed.

I remember Steve Wilson coming up to Wayne and me at the first Fantasticon in Los Angeles asking, "Are you having fun?"

My response was that we don't go to events like that to be entertained by others. No, "we bring the fun with us!"

I added that if the only guests they had were a tribble and Robby the Robot, we'd do panels on animals in science fiction and whether robots and androids are really alive—or if they just think they are.

Of course, hosting panels has become a trademark of our club. In what's become known as the "Chesapeake track" of programming, we've talked about everything from *Andromeda* to *The X-Files* and had a grand time doing so.

At one convention, someone asked me why we do so many panels. Aren't we exhausted by the close of the weekend?

"It's not work if you enjoy doing it," I replied before I headed off to be one of the panelists in another discussion.

Our club has also had its share of skits, which range from the famous to the infamous. We've walked away with our share of trophies as well.

Another mainstay of our group is the club newsletter. I remember coming up with the name "COMSTAR" as I was driving along one day (I do some of my best

thinking when I'm driving or riding) and using black-and-white graphics to fill out the pages of text.

Then Wayne came along and took the publication to a higher level, and now Phil carries the mantle of "Newsletter Guru."

To be honest, we've never liked the idea of working our way up a club ladder before we could do something we enjoy. Instead, we've just found what we liked to do and just did it.

Being the group's captain (I keep having to explain to people that starships don't have presidents.) has been an amazing experience for me. In the past, I was the "newsletter guy," and I never really considered sitting in the big chair in the middle of the

bridge.

Doing so has changed me. Wayne can tell you how much time I devote to things related to the club, and I'm always looking for new and wondrous things we could do "n the future."

It also helped me after I was in the car crash on Monday, September 22, 2009. (And yes, I still remember the day and date of the accident.)

As the healing process began slowly, I found two things particularly encouraging. First, I had a club of people supporting me even though I was in alien territory. And second, I was the *captain*, so when people asked me to do things that hurt like crazy, I asked myself the question "What would Kirk do?" and then went forward.

By the way, it seems that the story of the accident may be going out of date. I



Trek Lives!

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Check out our club website: www.usschesapeake.org

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SCIENCE TREK: Where We Were and How We Got Here

Memory is a fickle thing to waste. So I won't try and lose it here with my rememberies (oh, sorry, *Family Circus* moment. Won't happen again. Ever.) Since this is *Science Trek*, not *Refractions* or *Captain's Blog*, we'll stick to the facts, ma'am, in the irreverent manner you have come to know and hate over the past 15 years (yes, this column is only three years younger than Lorenzo's *Reflections*).

Where We Were and How We Got Here

Wherefore art thou, science and technology of 1991? Okay, that word does not mean what I think it means. But what I mean is this: let's talk about the world that was when our intrepid ship launched.

Here's how the world has changed in one short example. In 1991 if you said "social network," everyone would assume you were some nutty psychosocial scientist with a passion for computers. Today, they think of a 20-something multi-billionaire with 500 million friends. And that's just 20 years. This year is the sesquicentennial of the founding of the Federation (look it up).

Let's start with just how short these 20 years are. They seem a long time to me, after all that was literally half my life ago. But in the scheme of all things, if the time scale of the universe is written on a clock face with the estimated 13.75 billion years since the Big Bang equaling 12 hours, then our club has only been around for 0.006 micro-seconds (that's 0.006 1/100th's of a second).

Now that you're feeling insignificant, let's look at where science and technology has taken us since the Unready *Chesapeake* set sail for the final frontier:

Anthropology

Otzi the Iceman, a 5,300-year-old mummy, is discovered frozen in the Alps in Italy on the border with Austria. In New York City, construction uncovered the remains of a massive graveyard for Africans, most of them likely to have been slaves who helped transform Manhattan island into the City.

Astronomy

Truck-size asteroid 1991 BA is the smallest and closest "near miss" detected when it passes the Earth more than halfway closer than the Moon. On a more distant note, the first ever extrasolar planet was dis-

covered, ironically around a pulsar (the first planet orbiting a sun-like star would not be found until four years later).

Biology

The Institute of Medicine begets a committee to study "emerging microbial threats to health" (nap.org). A new species of whale is the first discovered since 1963.

Botany

University of California scientists publish a paper describing how roots from separate plants "communicate" with each other beneath the soil. Sounds like a vast plant conspiracy to me.

Chemistry

Stuff \$60,000 worth of chemistry equipment—including an infrared spectrophotometer, electronic scales, and pH meters—into a van and what do you have? No, not a sophisticated heist, but a high school teaching tool that visits 25 small and rural high schools.

Communication

Although the Internet itself was birthed in the 1960s by the U.S. Advanced Research Projects Agency and the World Wide Web proposed in 1989, the Web debuted on the world stage in August 1991. And the world has never been the same.

Computers

While 1991 saw the first Macintosh and Dell laptop computers, most people used their "automated processing machines" like high tech typewriters and game platforms. Only about a third of Americans had a computer in their home and a few more percentage wise used them at work.

Geology

Geologists in 1991 declared that "glassy blobs" found in the Earth provide support for the

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John Staton 5, 8

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REFLECTIONS: It Was 20 Years Ago Today....

"Hours can be like centuries, just as words can be lies."—Vanna of Ardana in "The Cloud Minders"

February, 1991. "It was 20 years ago today, Sgt. Pepper taught the band to play." I know a few of you out there remember where those words came from. If you remember when those lines were first uttered, you are as old or older than I am. But, it was 20 years ago.

Let's see, 20 years ago at this time, the United Nations had launched a massive air assault on Iraq. Boris Yeltsin was elected president of Russia. L.A. police officers beat an unarmed motorist within an inch of his life. Jeffery Dahmer was arrested for serial killing and cannibalism.

Television was mostly crap. The top 30 shows consisted of mostly of idiotic sitcoms (*Different Worlds*, *Roseanne*, *Full House*, *Who's the Boss...*), so it's no wonder that I watched very little

TV back then. Television did have some things happening of note: *Dallas* had ended after 13 seasons, Jay Leno had succeeded Johnny Carson as host of the *Tonight Show*, the fifth season of *L.A. Law* was unlike anything I had ever seen (my second-favorite show at the time), and I was just starting to hear rumblings from Paramount about a new *Star Trek* series on the horizon.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (my favorite show at the time) was in the middle of its fourth and best season. It's funny because February kicked off with the episode "Devil's Due," which, in my opinion, was the worst episode of its entire run. Ironically, it was *Next Gen's* highest-rated episode of all time until "All Good Things...." aired three years later. Go figure.

Yes, *Next Generation* was in full glory! Millions of new *Star Trek* fans seemed to appear from nowhere! The old guard of *Original Series* fans seemed to be

vanishing, or maybe they were just being usurped by hordes of rabid *Next Gen* fans. *Trek* was back with a vengeance. *Star Trek* was on the lips of every man, woman and child all over the world. Everything was in perfect alignment. It was the perfect time to start a *Star Trek* club.

By now, if you've been reading my column for the last 10 years (I've only been doing it for the last 18 years.), you heard the stories of the club's origin. You've heard how Sue Torbik, Lee McNair and Andrea Page decided that they wanted join a group of like-minded people to discuss their favorite show. How they went to a theater showing of *Star Trek VI* and passed out fliers beckoning people to join them and partake in science-fiction merriment. And the people came, and it was good.

Back then, we were members of the IFT (International Federation of Trekkers). Dues to IFT were \$9 a person, and club dues were \$11. We would soon abandon the IFT, and club dues would only be \$11. Ah, yesteryear. Randy and Wayne were doing the newsletter, Randy was editor, Wayne was accepting data on 31/2 or 5/4 IBM compatible disks in either WordPerfect (I know what that is!) or ASCII (I have NO idea what in the hell THAT is!).

It took about a year from its conception to get everything organized, recruit new members and become a bona fide club. The club started in 1991, but 1992

was when things became to move. Our first newsletter didn't appear until February 1992. I didn't join the group until March of 1992. The club started out with five to six members, and gradually, the membership started to grow. In a little over one year, our membership ballooned to 23 members.

As a club, we set parameters and laid out a careful plan as to how we would obtain status. We volunteered for the *Star Trek* exhibit that was housed at the Smithsonian Air and Space museum. It would be fun, but I distinctly remember a crazed group of tourists trying their best to stump me with *Star Trek* trivia. Of course, they picked the wrong *Chesapeake* member to mess with. I made them look bad. I made them look so bad I was offered a job by one of the supervisors. I declined. Humiliating tourists was payment enough.



The Indomitable Chesapeake Crew

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Sci-Fi Fans Living in the
Washington, D.C. Area

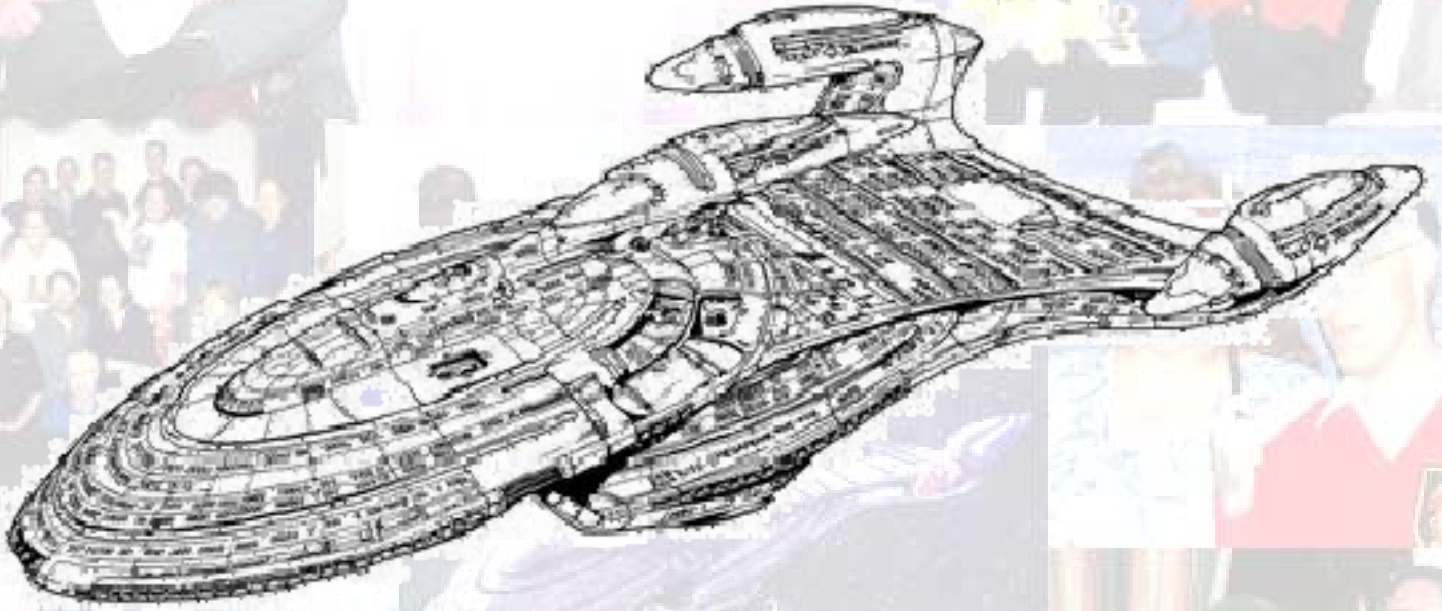
CAPTAIN'S LOG: Return to Tomorrow [concluded]

explained it to a woman I was having an interview with, and when she led me to the elevator, she remarked that if I hadn't told her about it, she wouldn't have believed I'd been in any kind of automobile acci-

dent!

share their interests in science fiction with. As a result, they hold onto their opinions with a *very* firm grip.

However, one of the reasons we do so well at panels is that we discuss the programs and movies we



dent!

Looking back, another reason for our club's staying power is the diversity in our group. Each of us likes something others don't, but that's natural for a club of about 20 people. When we like a new show or big movie, we tell each other about it, and that's opened many doors for those of us who at first didn't watch *24*, *Deep Space Nine* or one of the latest recommendations, *Human Target*.

Sometimes I feel sad for people who attend conventions because they have no one where they live to

watch with other club members a lot of the time.

And finally, one of the things I wanted to state in this 20th anniversary column was that it has been an honor and a privilege for me (and I'm sure the other club officers) to represent our club in various situations over the years, and I look forward to the next two decades with the conviction that those years will be as much fun as the past has been.

Happy 20th Anniversary, U.S.S. *Chesapeake*! ■

Captain Randy Hall

Rhymes with Orange

HILARY B. PRICE



REFLECTIONS: It Was 20 Years Ago Today... [*concluded*]

We began to invade conventions like bloodthirsty Mongol hordes! When it came to trivia, general *Star Trek* lore and television theme music, we took no prisoners! A three-day weekend at Hunt Valley back then was \$72 a night. Most cons were priced at \$40 for the weekend, \$30 if you bought you tickets in advance.

October 8, 1992, Oktobertrek: a day that will live in infamy, for this was the first of the infamous "Federation Records Presents" skits and the first of many crowning achievements we as a club would garner. We not only stole the Kroykah show (Klingon Gong show) on Friday night, but we took first place at Saturday's masquerade as well. I managed to steal third place with my interpretation of Geordi LaForge as Ray Charles. Anyone who hasn't seen these will get the opportunity at the Friday night party at the convention.

1993 proved to be a productive but trying time for the club. With great success often comes great animosity. There was infighting, behind-the-back motivations and a beach trip that turned hazardous and threatening. First Officer Andrea Page resigned amidst the turmoil, which promoted Lee McNair to first officer and Randy to second officer. Then, Sue Torbik, our original captain and co-founder, resigned under dubious circumstances. Near hysteria gripped the club in a vice, just as we were gaining a reputation of efficiency, aptitude and proficiency.

Fortunately, the storm was weathered, the hatches were battened, and we rode it out. Randy was elected captain, and all was good again. Well, not totally, there was still backlash stemming from the changing of the guard. This resulted in a sort of mass exodus of some original members. This was palliated by an influx of new members immediately sworn in to the cause who wear bright eyed, bushy tailed and totally unaware of what they were getting themselves into.

We continued to do conventions, but even they were starting to settle into a recurring time loop. Shore Leave in August of 1993 proved to be pivotal. I was becoming disillusioned with the way some panels

were being presented. It had digressed into a hour of false information and wish fulfillment. It had become a "Sit down, shut up, and if I want your opinion, I'll give it to you!" affair. I complained bitterly about it at the convention and a woman came up to me and asked me, "Do you think you could do better?" "Hell yes!" I replied. (No kidding, I really did. It scared the hell out of Glory.) I told her, "My club, the *Chesapeake* would make those clowns look like amateurs!" Allyson Mann gave me the number of the con chairman, her sister Marilyn, and said, "We'll see."

I had absolutely no idea how to run a panel. I had no idea how to get responses from people that did not result in me getting beaten up. So I did what my gut told me to do. I gave the number to Randy. If there is one thing I'm good at, it's passing the buck.

I mention this because it was the start of what became this club's legacy. What we're known for, revered for, worshiped for and loved for. Doing panels became this club's *raison d'etre*. Our panels changed the very fabric of the *Chesapeake*, maybe even the very universe itself.

Was it destiny? Was it fate? A predetermined paradox? The will of the Prophets? Yes, as David would say,

We quickly became the idols of thousands (well, that's how it seemed to me). People would come hundreds of miles, some thousands of miles to hear us speak on things genre and science fiction. It was almost

as if we actually knew what we were talking about! Women were rising up out of their wheelchairs, pushing away from their walkers to ask me out. We became celebrities, and our opinions mattered. And knowing this club as I do, that's a scary thought!

I know what you're thinking: He sure went a long way just to say "Happy 20th Birthday!"

And you're right, but the posture of the *Chesapeake* cannot be summed up in a few paragraphs. I had to search my soul to rediscover the status that the *Chesapeake's* achieved these past 20 years. How do you convey the club's dedication in one column? How does one describe the club's fortitude and endowment? (Hmm, maybe a bad choice of a word.)

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Enough Said

REFLECTIONS: It Was 20 Years Ago Today... [concluded]

How do I describe our reliability and willingness to bring alleviation when none is expected or foreseen?

For 20 years, the *Chesapeake* has been on the forefront of giving reliable, truthful information and squashing rumors as soon as they reared their ugly heads. We have been a force to reckon with in the annals of *Star Trek*, science fiction and scripted television in general. We have had our finger on the pulse of genre television since time immemorial and it still there to this day. There have been those who have challenged our authority, only to find themselves squashed like a bug and ground into a fine mulch. There are many more who seek out our opinions and embrace them as Gospel. Those are the crazy ones!

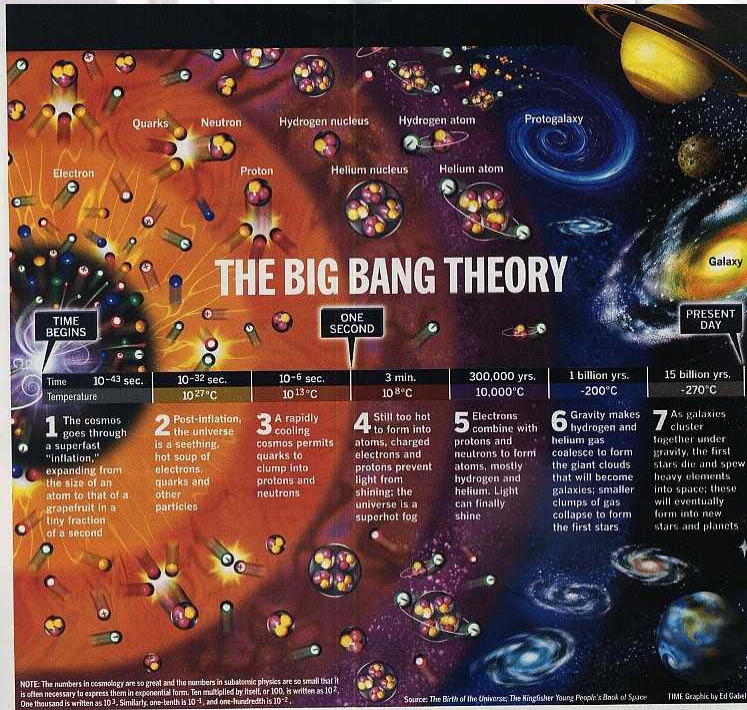
At a *Big Bang Theory* panel a couple of years ago, a woman questioned something I had related about one of the characters. I was trying to get them to see that this character was suffering from a mental affliction and that even though it was never said on the show, the clues were there. This disagreed with her



agenda, and she accused me of making it up. I assured her that I wasn't. She asked me how I knew this. I told her I had talked to one of the producers. She replied that she didn't believe me and asked if anyone else did. To her surprise, she surveyed the room and found a large group of nodding heads surrounding her. I looked her in the eyes and said, "You must be new."

I don't know where I'd be today if it wasn't for this club. Probably driving a truck somewhere (HEY, I USED to drive! I've caused more accidents than you could imagine!), pining away at the T.V. I honestly believe that the club has had more than a small part in whatever success I've had in the televised medium. The club gave me an outlet to talk about the things I always wanted to talk about but had no one to share with. Most of all, the club has enabled me to meet people, people I might not have met otherwise. In the immortal words of Homer Simpson, "I like my beer cold, my T.V. loud and my Gay fuh-lamin'!" Uh.....wait a minute, that was the wrong quote.....

Con Officer Lorenzo Heard



SCIENCE TREK: Where We Were and How We Got Here [continued]

theory that cometary impacts helped end the reign of the dinosaurs. Oh, and separately, Antarctica was connected to the west coast of the U.S. half a billion years ago.

Genetics

While it would be great to say 1991 was the year the 13-year-long Human Genome Project kicked off, it actually started the year before. This year, though, the project established the human chromosome mapping data repository to aid with the initiative.

Materials Science

A new cobalt-chrome alloy that supplants the stop-gape use of cement in hip surgeries, a giant step toward understanding why superconducting materials superconduct, and the discovery of carbon nanotubes are just three advances in materials science announced in 1991.

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COMING EVENTS

February 12..... Time for our next monthly meeting! We'll be at the Hard Times Café in College Park, Maryland. Mess hall opens at 5:00 a.m., followed by the crew briefing circa 7.

SCIENCE TREK: Where We Were and How We Got Here [*concluded*]

Medical Science

While the Secretary of Health and Human Services decried the rising cost of health care (what you thought that was a 21st century issue?), two scientists win the Nobel Prize in Medicine for discovering how cells communicate.

Ocean Science

In addition to the thawing of U.S.-Russian *nee* Soviet relations leading to discussions of joint ocean science research, the first global underwater acoustic experiment resulted in new methods to detect the effects of climate change in the ocean's temperature.

Physics

Construction starts on the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) in Texas, where they build everything big. The project is cancelled two years later because of cost overruns. Ironically also in 1991, the Council of the American Physical Society decides to publicly support basic physics over more glamorous projects like the SSC.

Political Science

In a year of great international turmoil (pick one that isn't), beyond the Gulf War that raged across

Iraq and Kuwait, Germany regained full independence, the Warsaw Pact dissolves, and the Soviet Union collapses, ending the Cold War.

Social Science

What can one say about the great social science achievements of 1991? They were generally the same as the year before and the year after—greater understanding, deeper theory, and more debate and dis-sension. Like a glacier, social science moves slowly but with incredible power, cover-



U.S.S. *Chesapeake*, launched on Stardate 44594.3, from Utopia Planitia ShipYards,

ing the landscape.

Transportation

No transporters yet. Private space shuttles are still a few years off, too, apparently. Just increased use of computer technology to make a multitude of transportation options more efficient.

One final note: 1991 was also the year that the Great Bird of the Galaxy, Gene Roddenberry, passed through the Great Barrier at the edge of the galaxy into the Great Beyond. ■

Second Officer Phil Margolies