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Star Trek: Re-Boot the Universe



A Proposal For:

Re-Imagining the First Five Year Mission

STAR TREK

RE-IMAGINING THE FIRST FIVE-YEAR MISSION

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From its debut on NBC in 1966 and through a variety of feature films and four subsequent series, Star Trek is a science-fiction franchise of historic proportions. Over the course of its history, some of the best and brightest minds in the industry have made substantial contributions to its legacy, culminating in the current caretakers of the Trek universe who have been on the job for nearly sixteen years. Like millions of other fans worldwide, we appreciate what these talented men and women have accomplished and care passionately for their work.

And yet...

There is trouble in the Trek Universe.



Re-Boot the Universe

Tokos Design Associates

Ratings have declined, demographics have stagnated, and it seems as if every few weeks a new article asks “What’s Wrong with Star Trek?” or “Can Star Trek Be Saved?”

Every writer who’s been asked to pitch for one of the Star Trek series or features knows that so many stories have been developed in the Star Trek universe that it has become increasingly difficult to move something through the system. The three most common responses are: it’s been done, it’s being done, or it would never be done.

Among both critics and fans, people who want the show to be a success, there is a collective sense that the franchise is just not as exciting as it used to be.

Why? Are the wheels falling off the franchise?

And what can be done about it?

The Question

Have you ever made a copy of a copy of a copy, to the point where, after enough iterations, the blurry words look like they were written on a 1947 Olympia typewriter with a bad ribbon?

Over the decades, Star Trek has become so insular, so strictly defined, and placed so many layers upon itself that some of the essence of what made us love it in the first place has been lost. The all-too-reasonable desire to protect the franchise may now be the cause of its stagnation.

Imagine buying a new Porsche and leaving it in the garage all the time, because if you take it out on the road, it might get scratched. But that is exactly what's happened to Star Trek. The Porsche's still clean and polished, but we're driving around in a nice, reasonable family car.

It's time to throw caution to the wind and go out for a drive...a real drive...

The Answer

Although fan accusations of burn-out and story-repetition from the creative teams may be part of the explanation, and certainly any team may need a time away after nearly sixteen years at the helm, there's a simpler answer at hand, one that need not paint these accomplished people in any kind of negative light.

The best solution is to go back to the original and start again.

It's time to re-boot the Star Trek Universe.

Concept

What we propose is not Star Trek: Another Generation, or Star Trek: A New Ship, or even Star Trek: The Search for Plots. In other words, not a copy of a copy, or a distillation of a variation.

We want to re-boot STAR TREK. The original. Pure and simple. The characters, universe and situations that have attracted, and continue to attract, a worldwide audience. Re-set... re-imagined... re-invigorated...

Imagine taking those characters, and using what we know now about the universe, and combining it with the kind of storytelling that audiences of 2004 are used to seeing in

modern prime-time television. Hard-hitting. Exciting. Character-driven. Innovative. And armed with the very latest EFX in support of our stories.

Start with the three best things in the Star Trek universe.

Kirk, Spock, McCoy.

Put them in the most durable concept ever created in sci-fi TV.

The five-year mission.

Star Trek.

It is time to go boldly back to the original, the “classic,” re-born and re-tooled for a new millennium, applying hard lessons and building in new thoughts that shake things up creatively.

It’s time to take a real risk, to push the chips out into the center of table, to once again put these incredible characters into play. Through their eyes, let’s see stories about the human heart in conflict with itself...and let them express genuine conflict that can jeopardize lives and friendships...and take them on a journey that will shake their view of the world and universe in ways they could never have imagined...

... because if we don’t do these things, then what’s Star Trek for?

Everything Old Is New Again

Before we go any further, let’s answer the obvious question: Will the fans of the original series (call it Star Trek: Classic) accept a new cast and series under the original Star Trek banner?

The answer, we believe, is a firm and unequivocal “yes.”

Remember, for a moment, that the final episode of Star Trek: Classic aired less than six weeks before humans first set foot on the moon. More than enough time has passed to allow fans the luxury of considering new faces in familiar roles.

It’s been nearly two decades since the decision to launch Star Trek: The Next Generation looked past the original Star Trek: Classic cast members. There was some criticism by fans, but even those performers, loved and admired by many, would tell you that the audience wouldn’t accept them in their earlier roles, nor would they likely want to tackle the rigors of series production.

By 2004, the original cast had moved even further into semi-retirement, and one of the pivotal three, DeForest Kelley, is no longer with us.

The infamous fan rebellion over the proposed “Star Fleet Academy” film, demanding the original characters in the roles, is no longer a viable possibility. For the first time, the fans are in a position to truly accept a new look at that series and those characters.

We ask Paramount to consider this chance, and seize that moment.

Because there’s a reason Star Trek: Classic worked. Not only did it convey a spirit of adventure, of optimism, of genuine heroism, the characters it utilized could not possibly be more iconic. They are classic, archetypal characters.

The warrior, the priest, the doctor...

☼ Kirk

☼ Spock

☼ McCoy.

Kirk, led by his emotions, knowing that in the end, they are what makes us human, what has pulled us across six thousand years of recorded history. A born leader who believes in passion, who will do what he must to avoid a fight, but will never back away from one.

Spock, a split-personality, in denial of his human emotions, striving to hold on to the logic of Vulcan stoicism. Competent, powerful, centered, but with a hint of loneliness at his core.

McCoy, the voice of wisdom, the healer, alternately humorous and cynical – the balance point between Spock and Kirk. The friend and confessor who everyone wants in their life.

The three of them form the best and brightest in Starfleet. Intelligent, but not above playful jokes and teasing at each other’s expense. Forged by common experience, three men whose bonds of friendship grow stronger the further into the void they venture. That friendship, that triumvirate, is the core of what made Star Trek: Classic work, and can make the series come alive again as well.

Besides the above named “Big Three,” all of the established characters will be in the new series, too.

☼ Scotty

☼ Sulu

☼ Uhura

☼ Chekov

Other new characters will be added as needed, of course. All part of the original series philosophy of IDIC, or “Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations,” a celebration of our differences, more applicable today than ever.

The key concept, though, is to re-cast the series using the original characters whenever possible. This is hardly outrageous, but seems instead to be the logical next step in the evolution of the franchise.

Let’s face facts: when they wanted to make feature film versions of “The Fugitive” and “The Brady Bunch,” they didn’t tell stories about Richard Kimble’s brother, or the couple that lived across the street from the Bradys. They stayed with what worked, with the core characters who had won allegiance from generations of viewers but updated them with modern sensibilities.

In the publishing world, the biggest success story in the comics industry today is Marvel’s “Ultimate” line, which re-imagines and re-creates popular, established characters, and has brought in new dollars and new fans.

Remember also that the famous super-heroes from comic books have been re-interpreted with great success in features and television with many different actors in the roles. Superman and Batman have been played by more than most and they’re still vibrant and in demand.

Consider Superman’s continual morphing and re-invention on television alone: from the straight-ahead George Reeves’ “Superman” to the romantic spin of “Lois & Clark” to the coming-of-age story in “Smallville.” On this latest re-boot, fans were wary of the “no tights, no flights” approach, but have ended up loving it.

Certain other characters like Wyatt Earp, Robin Hood, Billy the Kid, King Arthur and even James Bond seem resilient enough for one incarnation after another, across the span of time.

There is no reason for Captain James T. Kirk, Mr. Spock, and Leonard “Bones” McCoy (and Scotty, Sulu, Chekov, Uhura) to be held apart, like that Porsche in the garage. It’s time for these wonderful characters to take their own place among these other icons.

And here’s how it can be done.

Creative Plan

We will start with a two-hour pilot that tells the story no one has ever seen: the circumstances that lead Kirk and McCoy (friends before this) to meet Spock for the first time. It will involve their discovery of a lost city on an uncharted world, nearly a million

years old, and their encounter with the race that built it, a race long sought after by every civilized world for the tremendous advantages they could provide.

Along the way, we'll learn how Kirk – the youngest Starship captain in the Federation – won command of the Enterprise in the course of a battle with another race in pursuit of that ancient mystery.

By the end of this pilot, Kirk, Spock and McCoy will be aboard the Federation's Enterprise, poised at the edge of known space, poised to explore the billions of stars inside our galaxy. We will embrace, truly, the famous Captain's Log from nearly four-decades ago.

"Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise, her five year mission: to seek out new worlds, and new civilizations...to boldly go where no person has gone before..."

We will keep the classic silhouette of the Enterprise, but fit her out with a level of amazing technology based on what the best and the brightest minds tell us the future will look like in 200 years. Tricorders and communicators were predicted by the original Trek and are already upon us in GPS technology and cell phones. What new wonders can we predict for the future knowing what we know now?

We will keep the history of the characters, but give them the full range of dramatic possibilities that exist now, as opposed to the more rigid standards that existed in 1968. More complex, adult relationships.

The action-oriented pilot will bring these characters together, form the friendship that is the core of our series, and launch us into a voyage of discovery on a state-of-the-art starship.

As the Enterprise departs on our new five-year voyage, the tapestry of adventure and discovery from those first three "classic" seasons will be interwoven into our own five-year plan. This arc will allow us to blend what we know of the Trek universe and stories with new tales, and a new dramatic imperative.

We will place a mystery at the very core of the Star Trek universe.

Creative: The Mystery Behind the Mission

As noted above and as established in television history, Kirk was the youngest starship captain in the Federation...but what led to this? We know that the Enterprise was sent out to explore where no human had gone before...but if you stop and think about it for a moment, isn't that an odd assignment...to take one of the finest ships in the fleet, give it to the youngest captain in the Federation, and tell them to just go drive around and see what they can find?

It's peculiar...until you allow for the possibility that they were looking for something specific...something they had to keep a secret even from the rest of the crew.

Had Kirk, Spock and McCoy stumbled upon something that could have a profound effect on human history? Had they caught a glimpse of a new and previously unknown race a million years ahead of mankind...a race whose secrets could elevate humanity to unparalleled levels...a race that left its footprints on a hundred worlds where its touch had changed evolution and led to civilization as we know it?

A race, long thought dead, but which our characters know is still out there somewhere...waiting for us...waiting to see if its children can come and find it, there in the darkness between the stars....

And there are others out there, also searching for this race...forces of darkness who may view our activities with more than a little hostility.

One thing we will discover is that buried deep within the DNA of humans, Vulcans (even Klingons) and other intelligent bi-pedal races is a mathematical code, something buried so deep and of such complexity that it could not possibly have occurred by chance.

Someone or something put it there... an "artist's signature" perhaps...

In the re-booted Star Trek universe, there is a "Prime Directive" but it is not about non-interference in the matters of other races. This Prime Directive states simply that it is the mission of the Starship Enterprise is to do whatever is necessary to find this long-lost race, and discover the truth about the common origin of all life forms everywhere, the truth that will unite a galaxy.

Who are we? Why are we here? Are we special? Are we tools? Cannon fodder? Or are we being prepped for something...amazing?

Over the next five years, we'll offer up the answers.

Creative: Series Issues

As stated earlier, Star Trek will "re-imagine" that first five year journey, building on the existing character relationships, incorporating what we've learned about the future since the original series as well as advances in filmmaking and storytelling.

By incorporating these elements into an overall story arc, our episodes will create the sense that these explorations do not exist in a vacuum, that there's a reason and a mystery behind it all. Although our episodes will firmly stand alone, viewers will be rewarded for taking this journey because what is learned in one episode will inform what comes later. We want them

to feel that they are on-board the Enterprise with the original crew, discovering the greater story as they go.

By way of example, note that the original Enterprise never needed a holo-deck so that the characters could have exciting adventures because there were more than enough adventures, more than enough excitement, to be found in the real world they occupied every day. If you need a holo-deck to make an interstellar starship on the bleeding edge of the unknown interesting, something is seriously amiss.

So, in this new incarnation, if all you see is one episode, you get one really good story out of it based on honest-to-God exploration in an unknown universe bristling with mystery and adventure. If you watch several, you begin to see the larger storyline emerging out of the shadows.

There will be a beginning, middle and end to this series. It will be exactly five seasons, with each season equaling one year of their five year mission. The crew of the Enterprise will leave in our pilot episode, and they will return five years later from their scientific and security mission. If the studio or network wishes the series to continue after that, the chronology of our story will note that they have completed their mission, then move the franchise into new territory, or a new series.

An original narration from writer Samuel Peeples back in a 1965 draft of the first episode said it very well:

"This is our galaxy – a gigantic cloud of suns and planets, in which our Earth is but a pinpoint, one speck of dust. The galaxy is so vast that even traveling at millions of miles per hour it would still take millions of years to cross through it. And yet, as incredible as it seems, our galaxy is itself only one of untold billions of other galaxies, separated by voids of emptiness so vast that time, matter and energy may not even mean the same out there."

The stories we can tell in this series are as unlimited as the universe itself. We can mold and shape what has gone before into a new story that will feel fresh and original and allow us to make new discoveries.

We can also do something that the original Star Trek did to great success: purchase and adapt short stories by leading SF writers. The original Trek made use of the creative work of Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, Jerome Bixby, Fredric Brown, Norman Spinrad and Theodore Sturgeon. They provided the stories behind some of Trek's most original, innovative episodes.

Now imagine a new Star Trek calling upon the talents of writers like Neil Gaiman, Stephen King, Ray Bradbury, Dean Koontz, Michael Crichton, Anne Rice, Kurt Vonnegut, Anne McCaffrey, and others.

Finding stories by these writers that would fit in the Star Trek universe and adapting them would not only result in some terrific episodes, but would be excellent publicity for the series.

But the longest journey begins with the first step... one taken by a triumvirate of friends, on a classic tale of discovery and friendship. That relationship explains what made Star Trek: Classic successful, and it is that primary relationship that we will service in the new series.

Creative: Continuity

While we will avail ourselves of anything and everything from the currently existing Star Trek Universe that may assist us in this re-boot, we do not believe that this new Star Trek should be heavily burdened with the “reverse-continuity” of the past. It will only perpetuate the problem of painting creative teams into corners.

As noted earlier, the most elegant solution to continuity is to borrow from the experience of the comic book community. Fans have accepted for years that other artists and writers are continually creating alternative universes for classic characters. It’s become an established part of the fun. So this proposal exists independently of the current Star Trek: Enterprise series, and all that has preceded it.

Think of the following projects as “Universe A” in Star Trek:

- ◆ Star Trek: Classic
- ◆ Star Trek: The Next Generation
- ◆ Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
- ◆ Star Trek: Voyager
- ◆ Star Trek: Enterprise
- ◆ Star Trek: The Motion Picture
- ◆ Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn
- ◆ Star Trek III: The Search for Spock
- ◆ Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home
- ◆ Star Trek V: The Final Frontier

- ◆ Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country
- ◆ Star Trek: Generations
- ◆ Star Trek: First Contact
- ◆ Star Trek: Nemesis

What we propose today is “Universe B”, the unshackling of all the pent-up talent and ideas that are precluded from expression by virtue of what has gone on before. This universe begins again, in 2004, as simply:

Star Trek

If other series come after this, they will, in all likelihood, exist in this new “Universe B.”

That we reserve the right to make bold new interpretations does not mean that we will shun all the good work and characters that exist before and after in the Star Trek timeline. We may accept the vast majority of these decisions but simply change the way they happened.

A re-boot means a fresh start. That means not just new stories, but looking at our continuity in new ways.

We know that a planet-eater was rampaging through space in Star Trek: Classic...but what if we discover that the device was a left-over piece of warfare tech from the race our characters are pursuing? Do they allow the planet-sized weapon to destroy a sparsely-populated colony world if in doing so, they gain the time to get information that could save billions of lives elsewhere?

We know that the Enterprise was once infested with tiny cute Tribbles piled three feet high in some places...but what if they came equipped with an agenda, an attitude...and teeth?

We know that Scotty was constantly called upon to perform technical miracles and ably did so...but what if Scotty was a female character (just an example!), proof positive that in the future women equally excel in science and math?

Our point is simply this: the fun, the excitement and the passion of the re-boot is in the imagining of the alternative.

No one can ever compete with Gene Roddenberry’s original series. We can, however, stand on his shoulders and see things from a different point-of-view.

Creative: Laying Out Season One

Just for the sake of argument, imagine the following year-one breakdown of stories:

In our pilot, we deliver the story the fans never saw, the coming-together of Kirk, Spock and McCoy...the handing-over of the Enterprise...the mystery behind the mission...the launch into history.

Four or five episodes that build on this mystery, each with a stand-alone main plot but with a B-plot that lays out the clues like bread-crumbs. These would be the equivalent to the so-called “mythology” episodes which drove the “X-Files” series.

Four or five episodes where the source material comes from stories by major writers in the science fiction and fantasy genre, adapted to teleplay by our writing staff.

Four or five episodes that re-imagine specific stories or events from the original series, adapting teleplays from the original writers.

Filled-out by stand-alone episodes that place Kirk, Spock and McCoy in new adventures filled with action, humor, strong characterization and dynamic storytelling.

A season finale which drops a huge clue into play, and forces the Enterprise to take a stand putting its very existence on the line.

In this scenario, every episode becomes something that fans and critics will want to talk about. Even if elements prove controversial, it will only fuel interest in where the series is going. Web-sites will come alive again. TiVOs will be programmed. Conventions will sizzle.

The audience that has gone away, or has become indifferent, will take notice of this new life. And ratings will rise.

All of which brings us to...

The Coming Buzz

Mostly because there have now been four different series based on the Star Trek universe, the media has grown jaded, greeting the news of each new series with consistently less fervor and rising levels of skepticism.

But returning to the roots of Star Trek will change all that. It will rekindle a level of excitement not seen since the debut of Star Trek: The Next Generation. It may even surpass that launch.

Imagine for a moment the nationwide excitement as we look for the new Kirk, Spock and McCoy, as well as the other characters. (“Search for Spock,” anyone?) As well as using regular casting methods, we can open up a nationwide search, primarily for PR purposes.

We can even spread out the casting announcements to ramp up word of mouth over time, so that by the date of the premiere, interest is at an all-time high.

Paramount couldn't buy that kind of publicity. Fans not only will tolerate this, they will revel in the sheer boldness of its spirit.

This new series will re-capture the chemistry which existed between these historic characters, as it appeared on-screen, and as it translated to members of the viewing audience. It will give the fans what they've always dreamed of. A chance to see those wonderful, original characters done with the state-of-the-art talents available today.

Remember how thrilling it was to first hear the Captain's Log and to let your mind wander to what wonderful things would happen in that "five-year mission"? It can happen again.

Star Trek

Simple. Powerful. Accept No Imitations

The Team

The credits for J. Michael Straczynski ("Babylon 5", "Jeremiah", "The Twilight Zone") and Bryce Zabel ("Dark Skies", "Lois & Clark", "The Crow") establish them as key players in the world of television science-fiction. Between them, they have received eight WGA "created by" or "developed by" credits for series they have originated.

"Babylon 5," created by Straczynski, without the benefit of known source material, was the first American science fiction space series outside of "Star Trek" to go more than three seasons in over thirty years, and has become a franchise for Warner Bros., inclusive of a new "B5" feature film slated to go into production soon. His work earned him two of the prestigious Hugo Awards. In addition to his screen work, Straczynski currently writes "The Amazing Spider-Man" for Marvel Comics.

Besides creating the NBC alien invasion series, "Dark Skies," Zabel has also been involved in several successful adaptations of original sci-fi material to TV series, notably "Lois & Clark" and "The Crow." His work has been nominated by the WGA, and has won four Gemini Awards for "Outstanding Drama Series." His UFO film, "Official Denial", was the Sci-Fi Channel's first original film. Coming off a recent two-year stint as Chairman of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, Zabel is currently adapting the original book of "The Poseidon Adventure" as a four-hour mini-series for network TV.

They are no strangers to the world of five-year plans. Straczynski created one such comprehensive arc for "Babylon 5" as did Zabel for "Dark Skies" – before either series began.

Both Straczynski and Zabel have worked hard to include fans in their previous science-fiction series, and will take the time and effort to bring them aboard this new incarnation.



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