

# 'Star Trek' sequel is a noble Enterprise

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Brian Barber/Daily Nebraskan

This country seems to need "Star Trek." Massive, myriad doses of "Star Trek." Reruns, novelizations, novels, cartoons, movies, games and comic books of "Star Trek."

It's been more than 20 years since the first "Star Trek" episode aired. The original show featured one spaceship and less than a dozen recurring characters. It's easy, therefore, to see how the various forms of new "Star Trek" adventures have long since descended into minutiae.

## TV Review

The comprehensive "Trekkie" now knows the name of Spock's childhood pet, where Dr. McCoy's parents were at the time of his conception, who built the Enterprise, and where and what we did to get the Klingons so ticked off.

The crew of the starship Enterprise and its five-year mission are, in short, drained.

But "Star Trek" creator Gene Roddenberry has come to the rescue of those of us who feared that all "Star Trek" held for the future was a descending spiral of biographical, historical and technical trivia.

For Roddenberry has given us "Star Trek: The Next Generation," an hour-long, weekly, syndicated, all-new, live-action Star Trek that airs at 6 p.m. Saturdays on KPTM, channel 42.

"Star Trek: The Next Generation" takes place more than 80 years after the original adventures. It's set in an all-new Enterprise that's eight times the size of its predecessor.

The old Enterprise was a large warship, but the new one is more of a mobile military base. Officers can bring their wives and children along on the ship. The old Enterprise may have had a bowling alley and a movie theater, but the new one has an on-board shopping mall.

So it's not surprising the new series has a larger cast than the original. There are nine regulars in the "Next Generation" ensemble. Sensibly, the scripts focus on only one or two characters an episode, in rotation.

Patrick Stewart, a wonderful Shakespearean actor, is Capt. Jean-Luc Picard. Picard is older than Kirk and less of a swashbuckler, but like Kirk he has a gift for thinking and bluffing his way out of impossible situations.

Jonathon Frakes is Ryker, the Enterprise's executive officer. It's Ryker, not Picard, who leads dangerous off-ship missions, a leap in realism over the first series. Ryker and Picard are developing a rapport almost as engaging as Kirk and Spock's.

Michael Dorn is Worf, the second officer. Worf is a Klingon — they're on our side now, the bad guys are loathsome little rascals called the Ferengi. Worf's militaristic "death before dishonor" philosophy provides a necessary counterpoint to the rest of the crew's humanistic pacifism.

The rest of the recurring characters all have unique backgrounds, skills and traits. For the most part the performances are excellent.

But there are a few disturbing things about "The Next Generation." For one thing, there's a tendency to play up ship-board romances and sexual tensions. This detracts from the air of sexless professional camaraderie that was so attractive in the first series — no man ever ogled Uhura's miniskirt unless he was possessed by some weird space-drug. I'd hate to see "Star Trek" turn into "Dynasty on the Space Love Boat."

More disturbing is the new show's tendency to lift plots from the old. The two-hour pilot, for instance, featured the familiar tale about a pesky alien with super-mental powers who decides to judge humanity based on the performance of the crew of the Enterprise in a crisis.

It also featured a very funny cameo by DeForest Kelley as a 115-year-old Dr. McCoy.

Although direct references to the first series, like the cameo, are minimal, you'd think that in 80 years some new plots would have been discovered in the infinite reaches of the last frontier.

But the final word on "Star Trek: the Next Generation" has to be simply that it's a lot of fun. We fans who've yearned for more, but refused to settle for recyclings and trivia, no longer have to now.

## Film 'Less Than Zero' indeed

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muse, is completely ignored in Harley Peyton's screenplay. Peyton and director Marek Kaniwaska decided to turn the film into a turgid, unwatchable melodrama about drug abuse that is never convincing and a chore to sit through. The fast lane never seemed this slow.

Andrew McCarthy plays Clay, a wealthy college kid attending school back East who flies to L.A. for Christmas break and discovers that his two best friends from high school are addicted to cocaine.

Jami Gertz, the preppy snob from the ill-fated "Square Pegs" sitcom, plays Clay's girlfriend Blair, a coke-snorting model who just stands around in high-fashion outfits and looks pensive most of the time.

That's about all that happens in "Zero": Bored, strung-out patricians stand around, snort snow and ponder the essence of the "fast lane" while the camera zooms in on their sleek sports cars, designer clothes and immaculate houses.

Robert Downey Jr. plays Julian, a hopeless, haggard coke addict who has to resort to homosexual prostitution to keep the powder up his nose.

The plot, if one wishes to call it that, relies on every hackneyed cliché about the "beautiful people." The trouble with "Zero" is that it doesn't even attempt to explain why these people are so unhappy.

Unlike all the half-baked, name-dropping novels and films before it, like Jacqueline Susann's "Valley of the Dolls" and everything by Harold Robbins, "Zero" barely tries to unveil the depraved scenes of the jet set. We see a few lavish parties, a sampling of the L.A. after-hours nightclub society and an elegant Palm Springs snort-and-sex wallow. But such scenes are never explored with much depth or detail.

"La Dolce Vita," if you remember, spent three hours delving into the warped, surrealistic exploits of the rich looking for excitement. Fellini showed aristocratic bimbos getting covered with feathers and honey at 4 a.m., old men paying money to watch transvestites in cat costumes strip in cabarets, and stylish alcoholics searching for ghosts at sunrise.

But in "Zero," we see only trendies with

six-figure allowances grooving to remakes of Kiss songs and Julian posing elegantly on a beach with his sunglasses and beer.

Oh yeah, Clay and Blair hit a coyote with their 'Vette. "Oh, no, we've hit a coyote!" screams Blair tearfully. That's the most excitement in the film.

One would think that in a movie where nothing happens, the characters and their backgrounds would at least be examined. All we hear about the three friends is that they went to high school together.

Clay wants Blair to go East with him and attend college. He's so upset about her superficial modeling career that he has a dream in black and white, and the two seriously discuss why she should dump modeling and become a game-show hostess. Clay also wants Julian to go to college. "Do I look like I'm ready for homework?" Julian whines defensively.

As in all tragedies, the kids have problems with their parents, but again we only get to see a tenuous glimpse of it. Blair goes home to give Daddy his Christmas present, but he's too busy bopping his girlfriend and tells her to just leave it on the kitchen table. Blair pouts, looks glamorous and leaves for a party so she can dust her sorrows in snow.

Julian's Beverly Hills daddy disowns him, and when the coked-up little degenerate tries to go home and sleep after one of his nightly snortfests, Daddy tells him to get out, and his little brother beats him up. Oh, such is life without love.

Julian owes his dealer-pimp Rip (James Spader) \$50,000, and since the little dead-beat isn't doing enough gay hooking to pay his bills, the cold-hearted thug threatens his life.

Clay tries to borrow the money from his father, but Daddy refuses. Clay's family is a clean, upstanding one — they spend Christmas day singing songs by the piano while he and Blair make it in his bedroom with enough leather and artsy lighting to fill umpteen Calvin Klein ads.

Then the climax occurs. Julian goes through withdrawal, and Clay and Blair touchingly help him through it by placing a silver champagne bucket under his mouth every time he needs to puke.

See ZERO on 15



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