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*Essential trek-ness found in new science fiction television series*

**"Living in the Future"**

with Sam Keptfield

Science fiction is making a big splash on TV this year. Two series have already premiered — "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine" on Fox and "Space Rangers" on CBS.

Two more series are set to debut this spring. On January 20, NBC will premiere "Time Trax," which is about criminals who escape from the 22nd century to the 20th, and "Babylon Five," a series set on a space station in a contested sector of space. All four offer a mixed bag for the fan and the casual viewer.

"Deep Space Nine" is, so far, the best of the lot, and it is no stretch of psychic powers to foretell a long and happy run in syndication. It has a built-in audience of devoted Trek fans and borrows from "Star Trek: The Next Generation" for creative talent. DS9 is a run-down space station on the frontier between the Federation and the Cardassian Empire, orbiting the planet Bajor. The Cardassians abandoned it as part of a treaty, but sacked it before they left.

The show has that essential Trek-ness. The two-hour premiere on Jan. 5 featured a race of noncorporeal beings who had no concept of linear time, and the commander of DS9 had to explain it to them. It bordered on the pop-psychology frontier, but was well-crafted.

DS9 moved from its orbital position to guard at the first known stable wormhole, built by the aliens, which opens up a distant reach of the galaxy. It will, likely, be a source of contention for the Federation and the Cardassians in coming episodes — the next episode, set to air Jan. 16, will deal with an attempt to destroy the wormhole.

The acting is also first-rate. Avery Brooks as Cmdr. Benjamin Sisko is a man with a monkey on his back. His wife died in a Borg attack directed by none other than Capt. Jean-Luc Picard while he was a Borg hostage, forcing Sisko to raise his teen-age son alone. Sisko's wryness is a compromise between the stuffiness of Picard and the histrionics of Kirk.

Lt. Jadzia Dax (played by Terry Farrell) is a symbiont whose personality comes from a slug-like alien



linked to a host body. Rene Auberjonois plays Odo, the station security chief, a shape-changer (courtesy of the "morphing" pioneered in "Terminator 2").

The supporting cast will recreate the same ensemble feel of ST:TNG. Siddig el-Fadil plays Dr. Bashir, fresh out of medical school. Nana Visitor plays Major Kira, Sisko's Bajoran Number One (ST:TNG fans know the Bajorans as PLO types, who count Ensign Ro Laren among their number). Armin Shimmerman plays Quark, a Ferengi bar owner. It is an unorthodox mix of remarkable talent, which will lend itself to more humor and, we are promised, more romantic pursuits than on ST:TNG. However, the cast probably won't equal the legendary exploits of James T. Kirk, who bedded at least one alien babe per episode.

Acting is one of many problems for "Space Rangers" (Wednesdays, 7 p.m., CBS). The premiere on Jan. 7 introduced us to a group of interstellar cops besieged by budget cuts and faulty equipment. It's a second-rate "Hill Street Blues" with space ships and machine guns — yes, machine guns. Somehow a civilization that manufactures starships can't get the basics of a laser rifle down right.

The cast is run-of-the mill. A drop-dead handsome lead (Jeff Kaake), a half-mechanical repairman (Jack McGee), a humanoid alien (alien due to the weird bumps on his otherwise-normal head), and the obligatory knockout blonde.

The acting is what you'd expect from a cop show — everybody with chips on their shoulders, talking tough, with wisecracks falling flat everywhere. The sole standout is Linda Hunt (Oscar winner from "The Killing Fields") as the commander of Fort Hope, the Ranger's base. But even her performances are wooden.

The plots are simple, to boot. The premier featured an attempt to smuggle a drug known as XJ into the sector by fashioning cargo containers from it. (Big deal — Cheech and Chong did the same thing with a van and marijuana bricks.)

The special effects are, to their credit, excellent. Shots of a villain dissolving into small pieces and going through a wall stand out.

Unfortunately, the FX can't save it. I give "Space Rangers" until June before being canceled. For those who enjoy action and who don't like to get too cerebral with their TV or their SF, "Space Rangers" will cover the bill.

— Sam Keptfield is an avowed SF nut, born a century too early.

**Films, musicals, wrestling to enliven Lincoln**

From Staff Reports

More fun things to do in a town where nothing ever happens:

Join an experienced bird watcher indoors at the Chet Ager Nature Lodge at the Pioneers Park Nature Center on Sunday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. to discuss bird habits and feeding tips.

If that takes too much effort, take in a nature film at the Prairie Building, same place, Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m.

Are you an arts aficionado? The Sheldon hosts "No Laughing Matter," which opens today. The show focuses on artists who use humor to address serious subjects.

And "High Places, Acrylic Paint-

ings and Drawings by Michele Angle Farrar" opens tonight at 6:30 in the Haymarket Art Gallery. There will be a public reception and REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED.

"Reinterpreting the Land," an art exhibition sponsored by the Great Plains Art Collection, also opens Sunday at 3:30 p.m. You can probably pick up some snacks there too.

"The Jealous Potter," recent work by Mary Day, a master of fine arts candidate at UNL, is currently on display in The Gallery of the Department of Art and Art History in Richards Hall.

For the music minded, the UNL music festival is tomorrow at 8

p.m. in Kimball Recital Hall.

All the above events are free and open to the public.

If you're into spending cash, or really want to impress your date, "Fiddler on the Roof" is playing at the Lied Center and tickets are still available for the 2 p.m. show this afternoon. Prices vary.

"If I were a rich man..." Also up this weekend is "Bus Stop," a play, at the Creamery. There are Saturday and Sunday shows at 8 p.m. No ticket information was available at press time.

And finally, it has to be mentioned, the WWF Superstars of Wrestling do their thing Saturday at 8 p.m. in big, beautiful, Pershing Auditorium.