

ENDGAME



Larry Nemecek reports on how, for the off-season, it's *déjà vu* – in digital download form

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

It reminds me of the old chestnut, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Amazingly, there’s apparently been a lot of fandom grief already going on about the next *Star Trek* feature film from J.J. Abrams and his team. The vacuum of hard news has only fanned the fire of fandom debate and speculation – but what else is new? Like in 1979 and 1987 and 2001, it’s transition times like these when fans speak out, simply because so many care so much when the next new era of *Star Trek* is on the line.

I can’t predict what news or even leaks and rumors might overtake these comments before they see print, but I’ll bet credits to Navy beans that whatever it is the fan buzz will hardly be new. Abrams and his writers, Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci, have publicly pledged to follow canon – but, truth be told, they face a larger challenge in knitting up the vagaries and conflicts of known facts, not somehow violating them.

Fans have worried about the impact of new producers or projects on supposedly “established” canon at every turn, ever since Saavik’s name didn’t start with a “T’P” or the Klingons got bumpy heads. Most can take a step back and not only assimilate but embrace the new material, coming to realize the only threat here usually is to calcified assumption, not hard fact (not bad for a fictional universe, eh?) I mean, look – *Star Trek: Enterprise* even settled the Great Klingon Forehead Dilemma, finally.

But now, look who’s back in the spotlight. At presstime, most indications – like the teaser poster, by J.J. himself – point to the setting of *ST XI* as a pre-*TOS* adventure for the lowan and the Vulcan. It’s pretty sketchy turf, so there’s really a lot of wide-open territory to explore. Going as far back as the Academy days or “first assignments” might lose most if not all of the younger original series characters, so we’ll see. Canon debates about what roles to feature in a pre-*Where No Man Has Gone Before* cast on the early NCC-1701 – which saw no Uhura, Chekov, Rand or even McCoy, and Sulu as an astrobiologist – can be rendered



moot as well, if handled right. The differences might even yield all kinds of fresh new texture and untold story, not brickbats of broken canon – though I doubt if “A Fistful of Data” will go out of business anytime soon!

This scenario also brings up the old bugaboo of recasting such iconic characters. On one hand, observers point to incarnations of Superman, Batman, James Bond and Sherlock Holmes, to name but a few, and decry the snootiness of *Trek* fans on the topic. On the other hand, cut ‘em some slack; unlike all those comic/literary creations that first came to life as words or even drawings on the page, *Star Trek* was born right before our eyes from Day One with Shatner, Nimoy, Kelley, *et al*, living and breathing those creations. Actor and role are one – which is why the lack of Kirk and co. had many squawking in 1987 about ignoring *The Next Generation* as “real” *Star Trek*!

Now, a potentially more youthful time setting should finally allow recasting without seeming sacrilegious – although the debate still rages anyway. The outcome seems inevitable, but that makes it no less daunting for an actor to step into those shoes.

Some folks still even want to push the timing fight: “*Star Trek* is about the future,” they say, “and prequels

take us backward.” Well, I’ll tell ya: last time I checked, any era of *Star Trek* is set in the future... and as a background fan since forever, I’ve been among those clamoring to fill the maddening holes in the known timeline. In fact, Gene Roddenberry’s broad canvas still has so many gaps it’s silly to even refer to timing in terms of “prequels” – we’re merely adding more volumes to the *Star Trek* bookshelf, which by the way has a lot of room to spare. With apologies to the classic baseball film *Field of Dreams*, I’m convinced that if you build good characters and stories (and sets and effects) they will come – as long as the Roddenberry vision and a sense of unity is there to help it soar. Those who raised the issue with *Enterprise* before its 2001 premiere were close-minded; those who stayed disappointed point not to the concept but the slow-to-mature execution. And it’s a given that all productions will hardly be the same.

So relax, guys – we really aren’t going where no *Star Trek* has gone before. I do think these kids can steer. ▲

Larry Nemecek
December 2006