

Teaching an Old Sci-Fi Show New Tricks



(Courtesy of CBS Paramount Pictures ©2006)

Jacob Thomas Weisz

October 9th, 2006

In September 2006, CBS Paramount Studios began airing episodes of the original *Star Trek* series, with a new twist: this version was digitally scanned from the original negatives in high-definition, the exterior shots were replaced with computer-generated imaging (CGI) animations, and the background music was digitally rerecorded from the original arrangement. This re-release of all 79 episodes of the original series is in honor of *Star Trek's* 40th anniversary celebration. Trekkers and Trekkies alike have been divided on whether or not these “remastered” episodes of *Star Trek* are a great way to make the series appeal to a new generation, or a form of blasphemy, butchering the sacred thing that is *Star Trek*.

The first episode that was remastered is an episode called “Balance of Terror”, which aired on September 16th. The initial airing was the first episode featuring an alien species called the Romulans, and it involved several exterior shots of both the starship *Enterprise* and the Romulan vessel. In my opinion, there is a stunning difference between the original version and the remastered one. In the original 1960s version, the *Enterprise* was never shown at any angle except an almost straight side angle, and the Romulan vessel was blurry and almost indistinct unless you had a large television screen. The remastered version, however, showed the *Enterprise* at various angles, including an off-balance angle when the *Enterprise* was adrift without main power. The Romulan vessel, which was the most stunning difference of the episode, was a clear crisp image of the design, showing off what I believe was the full intent of the original creator’s vision.

People who oppose this remastered version state that one of the things that made the show great was the simplistic design of the props and vessels, and are concerned

about what creative license the animators might take with the CGI model. Not only did they take precise measurements from the original *Enterprise* model, they made sure not to add any details, like the feared hull plating upgrade. The CGI version is just as simplistic as the original model; it is just clearer and cleaner.

The CGI animators also completely reworked the spatial landscapes. Planets, galaxies, nebulas, and other space phenomena were all remade with vibrant color and dimension. The old red and blue spheres common to the original series have been replaced by stunning new CGI planets. On the remastered version of “Miri”, an episode where the *Enterprise* discovers a parallel planet Earth, there is now a CGI model of the planet, accurate with clouds and landforms.

Scenes filmed of the interior of ships as well as scenes filmed while the crew was on an away mission have a more minor change. They have simply been rescanned in high definition. But this minor change has a very significant effect. In a side-by-side comparison between the two versions, colors and details in the remastered version are more vibrant and noticeable, and the show even looks like it was recently filmed. It has also been reported, even though no examples have yet been aired, that some of the episodes where matte paintings were used as backgrounds will be edited to replace the backdrops with CGI effects. This will also mean that backgrounds that were completely static will now have slow-moving clouds and water.

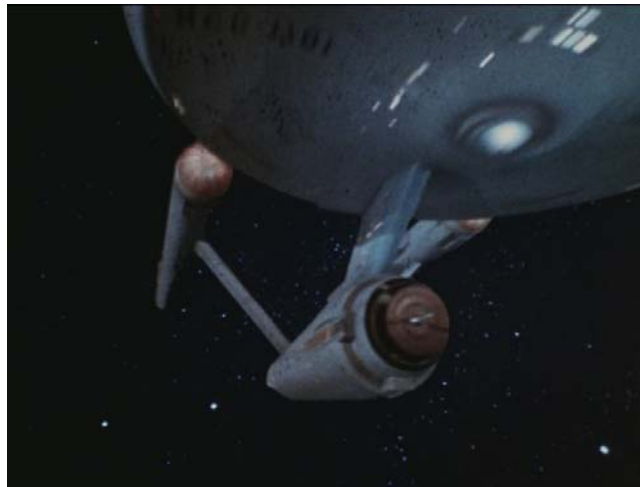
Another change will be the repair of several errors in the original version. For example, in the episode “The Naked Time”, Scotty was using a phaser to cut through a

sealed door, but there was no phaser beam. In the remastered version, that beam has been inserted.

The new main theme recording was done with the same tender loving care to the original as with the CGI effects. For the first time, the original arrangement was digitally recorded, exactly tone-for-tone as the classic version. Additionally, the original version of William Shatner's 38-word introduction was enhanced, not replaced by a completely new recording from an aging actor. This gave the new theme a new feeling, while maintaining every aspect of the original with exacting standards.

Remastering *Star Trek* was an effort by Paramount to revitalize the series for a younger generation of people, and they succeeded. It has all of the classic elements of the *Star Trek* we know and love, but with the new-age quality that seems to be a prerequisite these days for people's interest. New CGI ships and planets, high definition quality, and crisp audio tracks all contribute to making this version of the show better than ever. However, only time will tell whether or not the more nostalgic Trekkies will warm up to this variation of the series.

OLD



NEW

