

GE News

Women talk Sci Fi

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What's inside this issue?

So what have we for you this month?

Interview with Film Maker
Tim Vining

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Interview with Convention
Promoter ~ Stuart Blair



GE look who we talked to!

Tim Vining is the creator, author, director, graphic artist, animator, producer, sound recordist (and I could go on and on) of the animated film *Star Trek Aurora*. This is part one of our promised interview with Tim. Check out our next issue for the final of our 3 part *Star Trek Aurora* special tribute.

GE: Firstly Tim, tell us a little about yourself, who and what do you do in the way of a profession? Are you in the film industry?

Tim: I'm not in the film industry, I'm actually currently in the medical publishing field where I manage the illustration department at a leading medical magazine. I'm a trained illustrator--I supposed you might even say "classically-trained" since I went to school just before the advent of desktop publishing and computer graphics was widely in use--but I was subsequently introduced to computer graphics and video production in one of my early jobs where we produced training videos for engineering applications. Not terribly exciting, I'll admit, but I learned many of the basic skills there that I use in producing *Aurora*.

GE News: How did you develop these skills and have you always been interested in film making and animation in particular?

Tim: I developed many of the basic skills I use for *Aurora* in my career as an illustrator and video producer, and then I expanded these skills on my own. It's actually been a bit of a back and forth process, since when I first moved to my present job, I left the world of video production for one exclusively of print. For a time I pursued animation and digital video at home, until after some years, the publication I worked for decided to expand their publication online, and very soon after they began to make a push for online video and animation. Because of the video and animation I had been doing on my own at home, I was instantly the video and animation expert at work, and I have been able to pass on my knowledge to my co-workers.

I have always loved animation, and spent every Saturday morning and many weekday afternoons when I was growing up glued to the TV to watch any number of superhero/science fiction/action cartoons like *Spiderman*, *The Hulk*, *Thor*, *Captain America*, (I can still sing their theme songs!), *Johnny Quest*, the *Herculoids*, *Speed Racer*, etc. The Disney classic animations were great, of course. I enjoyed the *Loony Tunes* cartoons, *Flintstones*, *Jetsons* as well (though I despised *Casper the Friendly Ghost*--boring: no lasers, no dynamite, not even dropping anvils!), but when I would sit down to draw my own cartoon characters, I was always more interested in the more realistic-looking characters like those from comic books--which I enjoyed as well--than in goofy cartoonish characters.

In more recent years the CG (computer graphics)-animated works began to come out on TV and the movies. The TV series *Reboot* was one of the first CG-animated works to have real speaking characters, plus it was actually a lot of fun. *Starship Troopers* (the CG-animated TV show, produced there in Australia) was really pretty good, too, and is probably what *Aurora* most resembles. The *Final Fantasy* movie looked good too, but there really wasn't much of a story. The Pixar stuff--the *Toy Stories*, *Incredibles*, *Ratatouille*, etc.--are all great, of course, both visually and with great characters and stories, and the first *Shrek* at least was a lot of fun. Most recently was *Beowulf*, which, again, is nice visually, but the story overall is just okay, plus the characters are so realistic and look so much like the voice actors that it was kind of distracting--the CG kind of seems like a gimmick, and you can't help wondering why they didn't just shoot it live-action.



GE: How long have you been developing your skills in this area?

Tim: Well, I suppose really as long as I can remember. I've always enjoyed drawing, and when I wasn't drawing with a purpose, I was doodling. Constantly. I remember when I was 10 or 11 years old a classmate asking me what I would do if there were suddenly no paper and pencils to doodle with, and even today I can't make it through a meeting at work without a doodle pad. As for actual animating, that's really a skill I've only lately developed--*Aurora* is my first serious effort--and that's largely due to the fact that serious animation production by one person was virtually impossible until the past few years when affordable software and hardware suitable for animation became available to the consumer. I had the desire to do animation, but there was no way I was even going to attempt to draw characters at 24 frames per second by hand! The seed for animation, however, was always with me, since even as a child I almost never simply drew a picture of a character standing there, they were almost always doing something (shooting, flying, fighting) and I usually had a little story in mind for who the character was and what they were they came from.

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GE look who we talked to!

GE News: Have you done any other work other than Star Trek Aurora?

Tim: Nothing serious, just a few test animations. I started my journey into CG (computer graphics) character animation a couple years ago when I was using an earlier version of Poser (CG character software) and a simple 3D graphics program to create illustrations for a novel I had written. One day I was placing a static Poser character into a background image I had created, then remembered that I had read something in the Poser manual about animating a character to make it walk. I gave it a shot, and the result looked pretty good for not that much effort. The whole shot was about 5 seconds long, but I knew from my video experience that a one hour video is just a bunch of shorter shots strung together: if I could do 5 seconds, I figured I could do an hour. In time.



GE News: So Tim let's talk about Star Trek Aurora. Where did the story come from?

Tim: Hm, that's always the tough question, where the story came from. I guess it must have been partly a timing thing: I was finally ready to try some serious animation right around the time Star Trek: Enterprise was cancelled (tho, honestly, I had stopped watching it toward the end--I didn't like the direction it had taken, which was a shame since I loved the first season or two), so I suppose it was on my mind. I was feeling a bit of a Star Trek void, and I thought maybe other people might be feeling the same way, so I figured "what the heck, I'll make my own." (I honestly didn't know that there was already a pretty active fan film presence on the web until after I started Aurora, but I don't think that would have stopped me.) Also, science fiction--with spaceships, shiny surfaces and snug clothing--is a natural for 3D animation, which is generally better (and simpler) at simulating metals, plastics and things that fly in space than it is with more organic environments.

The question of where Aurora and its characters specifically came from is a lot tougher to answer. I actually wrote the first draft of Aurora in a few days, and it really just flowed out quite easily. Being able to draw on the world of Star Trek helped a lot, of course, since it provided a basic setting and general history, but the characters sprang to life for me in a way that I think anyone who has written fiction can understand, and the story that grew up around them formed itself into what really serves as an introduction to the two main characters--by the end of this story, the viewer will have a pretty good idea of who the characters are and what makes them tick, but presented (I hope) in a way that seems natural to the plot.

GE News: Your main characters are women why and who inspired them?

Tim: In a more general sense, I guess I've always been surrounded by smart, strong women, starting with my mother. (All you Freudians can now nod say "aha, now we are getting somewhere...") My father was an easy-going absent-minded professor type of guy, but my mother came from an extended Boston Irish Catholic family that had a matriarchal tradition that seems to run from mother to daughter: her mother (a nurse by profession) was the family matriarch whom the family always turned to for help and guidance, and when she passed away, the mantle was assumed by my mother. Now that my mother is getting on in years, my older sister (a doctor) who was always the most responsible of us seven kids, is taking up the reins, and her oldest daughter--who is the image of my mother at that age--is certain to be the matriarch after her.

I suppose because of this influence I've always respected and been interested in strong female characters, and never had a lot of patience for the frilly fainting kind. My favorite author growing up was C.J. Cherryh, a very prolific woman writer who has some great female characters in her works. Some of my favorite movie and TV characters over the years have been the kick-ass kind like Sarah Conner (from Terminator 2), Ripley (from Alien 1 & 2--skip the others), Xena, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer--all such great characters, but also, importantly, all somewhat flawed, and often reluctant in their heroism, which makes their heroic journeys that much greater since sometimes the toughest demons to fight are your own. Who doesn't cheer in that moment in Alien 2 when Ripley is riding down the elevator to the alien queen's lair to rescue Newt (another tough female) and she closes her eyes, lets out a long shaking breath, then sucks it up with sudden fierce determination in her eyes, and IT IS ON.

As for direct inspiration, Kara was fashioned to resemble my wife (a strong woman in her own right, who performs Kara's voice in pretty much her own voice), which is kind of a classic Disney device, where even the cartoony animal characters were usually made to resemble the actor voicing them. T'Ling I think pretty much resembles Jolene Blalock's T'Pol from Enterprise--I always thought she made a great-looking Vulcan. My wife voices T'Ling as well.

Overall, I've always preferred to write female characters. Before Aurora I had written a number of novels and short stories (unpublished as of yet), usually starring female characters. I find female characters a lot more fun to write since it makes me look at things from a different standpoint from my own, and through that lens things little fresher and newer to me, so when I describe them in words or depict them in animation, I'm seeing things with fewer assumptions than I might have if I was writing a male character.



Look out for part 2 of our interview with Tim in the next Issue of GE News.

GE look who we talked to!



GE News interviews Stuart Blair, CEO of Terra Nova Events and publisher of the Sci Fi Reporter. Stuart's upcoming convention '[Terra Nova VI](#)' features Aron Eisenberg 'Nog' from Star Trek: Deep Space Nine and Sean Williams, Author of the soon to be released Star Wars: The Force Unleashed book. The Convention is being held in Adelaide, South Australia (see poster below) on the weekend of the 22nd to the 24th August 2008.

GE: How long have you been involved in running conventions?

S: I have been the Event Director of Terra Nova Events since 2005.

GE: Is this a full-time business for you or just a sideline?

S: I am a fan like most convention promoters, which generally means we all have day jobs, mine as a Dental Professional.

GE: What made you want to be involved in organizing conventions?

S: I had attended several conventions around Australia and was quite dissatisfied with the poor standard of service being offered at that time. There were only a couple of promoters offering SF conventions to fans at that time and I knew I could offer fellow fans a well run and value for money event by including everything that I would like to see at an event as a spectator. Of course I am a businessman too, you have to be! Without sound advice on how to financially organise a successful event, your chances of fulfilling your dream of promoting annual events will soon diminish, so you have to walk a fine line between offering fellow fans attractive ticket prices whilst keeping your head above water so the event proves to be a profitable venture.

GE: Tell us about the process you go through to organize a convention, e.g. how do you choose your guests? The type of activities you will run?

S: I try to choose a guest that has a specific talent away from their acting so the audience can appreciate a hidden side to their fandom, one they would ordinarily not have the opportunity of witnessing giving the fan an enhanced memory of their convention attendance. At Terra Nova Events I can boast that each show thus far has had a different theme with events like live theatre productions mid way through the convention some actors have been contracted to perform ancillary events like musical shows and spoken word. I have had rare Star Trek memorabilia shipped from the U.S. (items owned and worn by DeForest Kelley) and were placed on exhibition. These items had never been on exhibit anywhere else in the world! I always include the mainstays like Dinners and boutique functions pre and post convention as well as Wine Tours giving fans extra time with their guest.

[Website www.genews-ezine.com](http://www.genews-ezine.com)



GE look who we talked to!

GE: Do you use volunteers to help run your conventions? If so, where do they come from?

S: I have a core group of ladies that volunteer their time to ensure a successful event, all of them having their own unique talents and skills, all of those skills vital to the events success.

GE: If money was no object, which guest would you like to have at a convention and why?

S: Well... my ultimate convention would be Jerry Lewis. Today's actors especially the comics lack the depth of character to maintain the status of Elite. Jerry Lewis is pure entertainment and you never get tired of watching his endless repertoire of films. He could go for 24 hours or more up on stage and you would still ask for more!



Stuart With Barry Jenner



Stuart with Avery Brooks

GE: Who have been some of your most memorable guests, and why?

S: I would have to say Barry Jenner from Star Trek Deep Space Nine is a real stand out for me. No matter what activity I asked Barry to take part in, he simply smiled and did it! He was a real gentleman, he genuinely wanted to know about you and your ambitions. Another favourite was Casey Biggs, also from Star Trek Deep Space Nine, Casey was brought as a last minute standing at my first event and when I met him at the airport, Casey was immediately into convention mode and accepted interviews within minutes of arriving through customs. Casey knew it was my first event and offered me advice and support which elevated my hyped up enthusiasm to an extreme. I will always thank him for that.

GE: Do you offer absentee packs (especially for overseas fans) for your conventions?

S: Yes...as a fan I can not attend every event and I like to obtain autographed memorabilia as a way of having some sort of tactile contact with my favorite stars. If a fan contacts us we are more than happy to give them their request.

www.terra-novaevents.com



GE why I love...!

Joss Whedon's BuffyVerse

Therese Watts

To say that I am an obsessed fan of the Buffyverse would, in many people's eyes, be an overwhelming understatement. Since I bought my very first Box Set, I have watched my growing collection of *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* DVDs around five times a year. This is no mean feat when one considers this show spanned seven seasons - a total of 144 episodes. Then, of course, I had to begin adding in the Angel DVDs as they came along (another 110 episodes - whew). I shudder to think of the hours consumed by my addiction. I wonder if there is BuffyVerse Anonymous out there, not that I would attend mind you, I rather like my obsession just how it is.

For the uninitiated, the Buffyverse originally encompassed all that comprised the *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* universe but has come to include the Spin-Off series, *Angel*. *B:TVS* is premised on the 'Chosen One', one girl in all the world chosen to slay vampires and fight the dark supernatural forces evil. These girls are bestowed supernatural physical powers upon the death of a Slayer. Because of the very nature of their work, the life span of the Slayers tends to be very short. Slayers are guided and mentored by a 'Watcher', nominated by 'The Council' an oppressive English group of mostly men that believe their way is the only way. Not satisfied with the whole stuffy traditional role of the Vampire Slayer, Buffy sets about rewriting the rule book as she pursues and vanquishes her prey.

Her success is in no small way attributable to the invaluable contributions made by her friends of the 'Scooby Gang' who, for the most part, have their own supernatural talents. A significant proportion of her early development must be credited to Angel, a Vampire with a soul with whom Buffy had a lengthy and stormy relationship. Knowing what a good thing they had with Angel, TV Executives gave the Spin-Off series of *Angel* the big tick. Angel moved to Los Angeles and, with Cordelia Chase, opened a 'Supernatural Detective Agency'. Poor Buffy, sniff sniff.

I would like to say that the strong female characters that are central to the BuffyVerse are what both attracted me and kept me hooked. Nothing that deep, I'm afraid. Two words: Angel and Spike! What can I say? I'm shallow. But, these two characters, no matter how lick-a-licious they are, could not keep me revisiting the entire series of both Buffy and Angel as often as I do. Joss Whedon must take a bow here. His slick, concise and intelligent writing and directorial skills are innovative and heartfelt. His style is embedded in every episode, even those he did not write. Every script received his undivided attention and was invariably tweaked by him.

Evidenced by the sheer diversity of the demographic base of fans, the Buffyverse has continued to reel in more and more viewers. Not bad since *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* finished in 2003 and *Angel* wound up the following year.

Errrgh aaargghh!



Pictures of
James Marsters
taken by Therese
at a convention



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If you have a show, event, or convention etc let us know and we will put you here too! Send and email to: Contact@genews-ezine.com

DR WHO SEASON 4 (SO FAR)

Gerri (G)

Whoo Hoo Dr Who is back!! At last the wait is over and my household has something that we all watch together again! Loved the Adipose! Who would not want to have one of those adorable little creatures as a pet! The being in the Pompeii episode was a bit like a monster that was related to Godzilla and the special effects looked like it was straight out of one of his movies. I was not overly keen on the big brain in the Ood episode very surreal and squishy!! Slightly over the top I think! Overall though I am thoroughly enjoying the new season of Dr Who, but, when will Donna stop crying? Maybe we should invite her to OZ so that she could help us get our water supply back to capacity!! I do like the fact that she does not see the Dr as someone to fall for, (thank goodness), so there is none of the sameness as the first two companions in the new series. David Tennant is still the same gorgeous Doctor and again plays the part with joy and enthusiasm that he has displayed in seasons two and three. Donna I don't mind she is not my favourite, if I was to claim one Martha would be it, but she is in the next one so will have my cake and eat it too! Overall I am glad to know that the TARDIS is back, I missed her!

DR WHO SEASON 4 (SO FAR)

Eugenia (E)

I want an Adipose!!! What a way to lose weight! Even though the first episode of Series Four was cheesy, I loved it! It has classic comedy sketch makings as the Doctor and Donna kept missing each other and when they finally do meet, what a chuckle I had to myself with Ms Foster watching their mimed conversation like a person watching a tennis match. I really didn't mind Donna of *Runaway Bride* and was looking forward to her return. Another character I am enjoying is her Grandfather. I remember watching him in one of the original Dr Who movies and in "Carry On" films, not forgetting that he was the voice of "The Wombles". Well there wasn't much to watch at 5.30pm in Whyalla, South Oz!! The Pompeii episode was a bit of a disappointment. The fiery monsters were a badly drawn Pokemon, the sets impressive. The Ood episode was well written. I got as emotional as Donna towards the end when I found out what the humans had been doing to the Ood. The episode's strong social comment is something that would fit easily in a course of study exploring slavery and exploitation. Yes, I give this season so far the thumbs up. And I still can't get over how a skinny, stonie eyed man could be so sexy!! David Tennant, what a honey.

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