

Khitomer Conference 2021

The (un)Importance of Canon

Host: AlexM (Pegasus Fleet)

Room One • Session 6

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:01:15 PM

Let me tell you the story of a Star Trek series that consistently plays fast and loose with its own canon. A series that consistently disregards previously established rules in order to serve its own purposes. A series that when forced to choose between being consistent and telling its story chooses the story every time.

What series comes to mind? Am I talking about Discovery? Enterprise? What if I told you I was talking about The Original Series? Or The Next Generation? In fact, what if I told you I was talking about the franchise as a whole?

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 3:01:47 PM

I'll admit that "every one" was the first thing that came to mind.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:01:56 PM

Thank you all for joining me for this discussion today. I hope everyone has been having a great Khitomer so far. For those of you who don't know, I'm Alex. I've been simming for around twelve years. Most of that time has been spent in Pegasus Fleet, where I've been running Starbase 332 for the past eight years, and serving as the Fleet commanding officer for the past six. During my time simming, and just being a fan of Star Trek in general, I've noticed a heavy love-hate relationship with that thing called "canon".

For my discussion today, I'm going to make some arguments that some members of the greater Star Trek fandom may consider controversial. I want to preface this discussion with what it is *not*. This is not a venue to discuss whether or not something *should* be considered canon. It is also not a venue to discuss the quality of a show based on its adherence to canon. I will be discussing some aspects of "New Trek" and how it relates to the rest of the franchise though I will try my best to keep spoilers to a minimum. I know some of the new shows have garnered mixed reactions from parts of the fandom, to say the least. This is not a venue to bash shows that you don't like. While there may be legitimate reasons why someone is not a fan of the newer shows, my argument today is that adherence to canon should not be one of them. I'm asking all of you now to avoid getting out in the weeds talking about whether or not we like a particular work, or getting into arguments about something being canon or not. For the purposes of this discussion, if the creators consider a work canon, then it's canon.

So before we get much further today, what is canon? According to the Memory Alpha wiki, canon is a sanctioned or accepted group or body of related works. The Star Trek canon is generally defined as all released television series and feature films. Essentially, anything that has appeared on screen is accepted as canon. Various

"official" works, such as the Star Trek Encyclopedia or the Star Trek Chronology, may be used as a guide to canon information, but are not canon in and of themselves.

Part of what makes this definition tricky is that what is defined as canon may vary for different fans. Some fans only accept what was clearly shown or stated on screen. Others do accept reference sources. Others may accept what was shown in various books. In Pegasus Fleet we generally refer to official canon in one of two ways. Alpha Canon is anything that has appeared in some way on screen in an episode or film. Beta Canon fills in the gaps using licensed works, like novels or official references. These names are derived from the two major Star Trek wikis, Memory Alpha and Memory Beta, respectively. As with most simming communities, we have a couple of deeper levels of canon: Fleet Canon and Sim Canon. Fleet Canon and Sim Canon are determined by the Fleet and the sim, respectively, though it is generally accepted that Alpha Canon trumps Fleet Canon, which in turn trumps Sim Canon, and Beta Canon is just used to fill in some gaps where needed. I would imagine that most simming communities do something similar.

Are there any questions so far on what constitutes canon?

So now that we are all on the same page about what canon is, I want to get into the meat of this discussion. Many members of the Star Trek fandom look to canon as the ultimate authority when it comes to the Star Trek universe. Star Trek's canon is something that has persisted for over fifty years, across thirteen movies, eight television series, and soon to three more series in the coming years. Whether or not a show fits into canon has become a major talking point among parts of the fandom, especially when talking about the newest shows. This is because Star Trek's shared canon and attention to detail is one of the greatest aspects of the franchise.

But is it really that important?

Since you're here, you probably already know where I stand on this topic. But what do you think? Is strict adherence to canon important? Why or why not?

[OF] Emu - Fawkes/Loki/Acad 2/20/2021, 3:05:43 PM

Yes if we talk about it as a foundation, but there's plenty of stuff that's sufficiently vague to allow for wiggle room.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:06:24 PM

I feel since I gave a panel last year on how important it was I should probably just say: "yes", with qualifications since the idea and themes of a work really matter in establishing how something feels. And if it's your own setting, then absolutely you should probably not wander off into the woods.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 3:06:44 PM

In my RP, we have three levels of canon - It's "soft" if it's on the forum (RPed), and wiki stuff is "firm" and overrules the forum because it's the shared documentation. But

when it's on the shared wiki with RP behind it the canon comes together like Voltron and becomes hard canon.

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:07:00 PM

Hmm...I feel like there are certain themes and threads that run through canon that really should not be messed with, but then there are specific details that get changed from episode to episode or series to series.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 3:07:38 PM

Also, headcanon is not canon 😊

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:07:39 PM

(I also think that you shouldn't violate established detail unless you can make it fit, but that kind of rule would require a lot of reconciliation of various events in Trek.)

Nikki 2/20/2021, 3:08:50 PM

canon has to be important on some level, or else you'd just have an open world. to what degree is going to depend on the sim itself and it's managers and whatever explicit or implicit agreements they have with their fleets, if they're in one.

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 3:09:45 PM

Some canon should be strictly adhered to... some of it is a great building block for exploration and writing.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:09:59 PM

much like the sandbox discussion earlier, there needs to be some common ground to build on

Nikki 2/20/2021, 3:10:05 PM

i had to decline a player that said they had never watched trek, didn't intend to watch any, and didn't want to do any research. they wanted to make everything up, and it didn't matter to them if it conflicted. It was going to knock over everyone else's sandcastles.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 3:10:25 PM

Right, if you've got multiple ships it's nice when they can reference each other and have a common understanding of the events and changes in the sim universe. A wiki is great for documenting these things. Like if a ship leaves a shuttle on a planet you can put that on the planet's page so other ship can find it someday.

[OF] Sepandiyar 2/20/2021, 3:10:27 PM

and then pee on them

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:10:30 PM

why.. were they joining a trek RP then...

VictorBarclayDeTolly 2/20/2021, 3:10:58 PM

Not all books are canon. However some books are based upon what was said in an episode like Picard Stargazer's days. The Destiny series about wiping out the Borg, most say no. Now for the Animated Series, some say canon and some say not.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 3:12:09 PM

Assign his character as a mental patient and have all the other characters smile and nod at his character but not take him seriously 😊

"Sure, buddy."

"Hyperspace drive? Yeah, I'll activate that right away champ."

Nikki 2/20/2021, 3:13:25 PM

i don't want to pick on him, but it was a situation that came up because i did have a very loose independent sim with a lot of non-canon additions. what he didn't understand was they were possible *because* of the accepted canon.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:13:39 PM

I think I'm seeing a lot of common themes in here. It seems that pretty much everyone agrees that a strong foundation is important. And I don't disagree at all. The devil's in the details, and those details can really be devils when you're trying to make them fit later.

I'd like to share a quote with you.

"Canon is only important to certain people because they have to cling to their knowledge of the minutiae. Open your mind! Be a 'Star Trek' fan and open your mind and say, 'Where does Star Trek want to take me now?'."

This was said by Leonard Nimoy to Reuters back in 2009. At the time Nimoy was promoting *Star Trek* ('09), but I think his words are just as applicable today. At the end of the day, does it really matter if Discovery or Picard writers remembered an obscure detail established thirty years prior? Does it really matter if the details were fudged a little in favor of telling a compelling story? In my opinion, no, it doesn't matter. Canon should never get in the way of a good story.

As I stated at the top of the hour, the Star Trek franchise has shown throughout its history that telling a compelling story is going to come before maintaining its internal consistency. If they can do both, that's always better. But as time goes on, and the number of episodes grows, keeping every detail consistent across the franchise becomes more of a chore than a virtue. And sometimes, writers just think of a new

premise, a way to advance the characterization of a character or the overall setting of a show. For these reasons Star Trek's canon is full of contradictions and changed premises. That doesn't make it lazy writing. It just means that there are some rules that are meant to be bent and broken.

[SA] Wes of Star Army 2/20/2021, 3:16:37 PM

In a roleplaying game, it certainly helps us tell a coherent story when we're all on the same page. If one person thinks Romulans are the enemy and another person sees them as refugees and you introduce a Romulan character things could get weird quickly.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:16:55 PM

But Romulans can be both

that's where flexibility in canon comes in

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:17:24 PM

I'm going to come back to how we can use canon as roleplayers in a little bit.

There are examples abound throughout all of Star Trek, beginning with The Original Series. As the early series progressed, it took time for it to find its footing and to build its setting. The organization of Starfleet, which we all know and love, wasn't even a concept until part way into the first season. Many early episodes refer to the United Earth Space Probe Agency and a United Earth, and the United Federation of Planets was still some time away from existing. History and backstory of some of the most famous episodes would be retconned out of existence and ignored by later shows. For example, the Eugenics Wars, a devastating war that took place all over the world in the late 90s, and yet was not considered to be World War III, would be all but ignored by most later works. Even Spock and the characterization of Vulcans would evolve over the first season. The Enterprise ran on lithium crystals, instead of the fictional dilithium that would become a franchise staple. Even the time period was not set in stone, with "The Squire of Gothos" suggesting that the show took place in the 28th Century.

By the time *Star Trek The Motion Picture* was envisioned, new budgets allowed for advancements in visual styles, most notably the change in appearance of the Klingons. The Klingons were far from the only main race to get a facelift over the years. Changes in makeup led to visual changes throughout the franchise, such as the inconsistent forehead ridges on Romulans, or the change in appearance of the Trill between their first appearance on TNG and the start of DS9. For those that prescribe to the idea that everything that appears on screen is canon, how can these changes be reconciled?

One could argue that TOS was still finding its footing, and so it's only natural that there were some changes in canon and continuity. But what about the later shows? Star Trek The Next Generation established early on what post-World War III Earth

looked like during the post-atomic horror era. But the timing and appearance of this part of Trek history did not match up with the appearance of post-atomic Montana in *Star Trek: First Contact*, an era which would be further expanded upon in *Star Trek: Enterprise*.

Money in the Federation has been a disputed question since *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* when Kirk mentioned that they don't have money in the 23rd Century. Picard in *First Contact* seems to confirm this. But seeing Starfleet officers frequent Quarks, who definitely does expect to get paid, seems to suggest otherwise.

One of the most amusing and often mentioned changed premises is that of Chief Miles O'Brien. Everyone's favorite *Star Trek* non-commissioned officer did not start that way. His first appearance was in "Encounter at Farpoint", where he served as the Enterprise's conn officer. He had no name, and the rank of Ensign. He appeared in another episode with a gold uniform and no rank insignia, appearing in the credits as "First Security Officer". By the second season he's become "Transporter Chief" and holds the rank of Lieutenant. Eventually he would be given the name O'Brien, and the Episode "Family" firmly established him as a chief petty officer, a non-commissioned rank. Throughout the remainder of his time on TNG, and at least part way through Deep Space Nine, O'Brien's rank insignia would continue to fluctuate.

Even the series with the myth arc that lent itself the most to follow its own continuity and canon, *Star Trek Voyager*, regularly violated its own premise. A lone Federation starship, lost on the far side of the galaxy, with only 38 photon torpedoes and some hope to their name. By the end of the series, concerns over power conservation and food rationing is completely gone, and Voyager has returned to the Alpha Quadrant after firing nearly 100 torpedoes. And not once did anyone ever bring up that time that Paris and Janeway turned into newts and had babies.

Treaties and wars and timeline details have been fudged many times over the years. Who is a member of the Federation? When did they join? When was this massive war between the Federation and the Cardassians fought? How were the Trill an unknown species when first met by the crew of the Enterprise-D, but a past host of Dax once had a fling with Dr. McCoy?

VictorBarclayDeTolly 2/20/2021, 3:19:48 PM

Now *Star Trek* shows like *Star Trek New Voyages* and *Star Trek Continues* tell a story like how Carol Marcus got pregnant or what happens to Apollo later. It feels like canon, so those who say no, you are missing the point of a good story.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:19:53 PM

Someone mentioned in a previous panel today that it's too bad you can't change your sim's bridge? Well, why not? It's not like *Star Trek* has never changed the bridge. In each of the six TOS films, the Enterprise bridge was a little different. Sometimes subtly. Other times blatantly. The Enterprise D bridge saw some subtle changes over the years, and some not so subtle changes for *Star Trek Generations*.

Before we move on, does anyone have any examples that they'd like to mention?

[OF] Emu - Fawkes/Loki/Acad 2/20/2021, 3:22:31 PM

Section 31

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:22:34 PM

We have a saying on our resources team whenever we can't quite explain how something works differently in two different places - "...because the script said so."

Sometimes, getting wound up over the details (like whether a photon torpedo is a firecracker or a super atom bomb) can make us lose sight of those greater arcs and threads I mentioned earlier.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:23:25 PM

What about Section 31? Just the way it's been portrayed from series to series?

[OF] Emu - Fawkes/Loki/Acad 2/20/2021, 3:23:47 PM

Super inconsistent from series to series, indeed 😊

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:24:07 PM

shadowy spy organization is not what it appears....

lol

[OF] Emu - Fawkes/Loki/Acad 2/20/2021, 3:24:26 PM

Yeah, I guess you can write it off as that 🤔

It just seems like it was forced in in places where it didn't belong due to it being so popular in DS9

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:25:39 PM

having a friend who works in Homeland Security here, I feel as though how an org or parts of it are seen can vary a lot

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:25:45 PM

The Prime Directive. We had someone just this week asking whether it violates the Prime Directive to make contact with a group of humans who did not meet the technology requirement because they'd been taken by aliens in the past and brought to another planet (a la "The 37s" or "New Eden")

It's hard to tell when things aren't actually a violation and when the characters are just stretching/breaking it because they chose to do so.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:26:24 PM

That's a good example. The Prime Directive has been anything but consistent, and it's supposed to be Starfleet's number one rule.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:26:46 PM

Kirk rationalized breaking it in multitude of ways

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:27:08 PM

Starfleet's or the Federation's? Early *TNG* seemed to say that only Starfleet was bound by it (which seems silly, if any civvie can just waltz up to an non-spacefaring species).

^ example of changing canon over the series

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 3:27:26 PM

Voyager seemed to explain it away as acceptable because a) they were inside a spaceship and b) they were all human

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:27:52 PM

Right, and the captain in "New Eden" ruled it would be a violation to reveal themselves to those humans.

Sorry...getting down the rabbit hole, but this proves your point, [@AlexM](#)

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:28:30 PM

I usually think that the writers choosing not to respect canon is not reason for .. well, us not to

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:28:56 PM

No, no. You're fine. That's a great example.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:29:02 PM

(I mean, that litany actually touches on why I don't have much respect for Voyager. Precisely *because* it ignored canon so often. I felt like I was watching people not care so why should I?)

[PF] Amethyst 2/20/2021, 3:29:31 PM

"Discontinuity is the trademark of Trek"

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:29:32 PM

I mean, there's certainly some level of established mintuate you probably *should* disregard.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:29:58 PM

we had a great mission that wrestled with the prime directive - does it apply when you discover that a different species is already interfering?

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:30:01 PM

but it's more of a case by case basis with a "is this a good reason to disregard it?"

. but I'm more of a canon maximalist, so..

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:30:39 PM

I think there's choosing not to respect canon, and trying to tell a compelling story. Is it better to write yourself into a corner rather than break canon?

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:30:50 PM

You know, I've seen some posts online over the years that somewhat jokingly talk about how the episodes we see are based on people's logs (which may or may not have been a scientifically accurate, point-by-point description of the events), thus explaining the some of the differences in details.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:31:16 PM

If I find myself in a story that requires me to break canon, my first instinct is to rewrite the story, honestly.

my second is "Can I make a limited exception in a way that we find things that seem to violate the laws of physics but really don't when you look at it."

Nikki 2/20/2021, 3:32:24 PM

exceptions to prove the rule

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:32:51 PM

To me, I think it comes down a lot to how it breaks canon. Are we ignoring entire historical events? Or are we forgetting if Kirk was born in Iowa or in space?

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 3:33:21 PM

I remember the TOS episode "A Private Little War" (where Kirk and Spock beam down to a village on the Klingon border only to find the Klingons arming the locals with guns), so Kirk did the same,

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:33:38 PM

@AlexM: You mentioned earlier the "traditional" levels of canon used by many simming communities (*Trek*, community, sim). You've also spoken about there being a difference between minutia details and overarching themes.

Is there perhaps a different frame for looking at canon that you would recommend?
One that could go alongside the "traditional one"?

Nikki 2/20/2021, 3:33:44 PM

i loved it when the series nodded at itself in trouble with tribbles from DS9 going back in time, and Worf "doesn't want to talk about it" (why klingons are different aesthetically)

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:34:41 PM

yes, but that was cold war type setting. This was also our First Contact with the species interfering

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:34:44 PM

that was pretty good

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:35:34 PM

I'll talk a little about that. I like to take the "broad strokes" approaching, looking at the big picture rather than the tiny details.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:35:48 PM

my personal rule for canon is "don't sweat the small stuff"

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 3:36:30 PM

Sometimes I wonder how much we could get away with blaming time travel for certain small inconsistencies (speaking of "Trials and Tribble-ations")

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:37:42 PM

You know, I always felt like Enterprise did Worf's line an injustice by trying to explain it. I feel like some things don't really need an explanation. The appearance of the Klingons is one of them. So many visual decisions are made based on budget and style, and should we really tie the creators' hands by keeping them from innovating the visuals out of respect for the details? Especially if they get the big picture right.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:37:42 PM

there are very well accepted concepts that are foundational, but a lot of details are just that. They can be important in some contexts, but they can often also be limited to particular instances

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:38:17 PM

We're kind of getting into my last major points, so I'll go ahead and share that and we can continue the conversation.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:38:22 PM

I agree, although I think that was one of the strong arcs of Enterprise

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:38:59 PM

It was, and I absolutely loved season four of Enterprise. But it makes this question of canon even harder for us, in my opinion.

Most of our discussion so far has been about how Star Trek as a whole has often violated its own continuity and canon throughout its history. But what does that mean for us? Does that really mean that everything we hold dear and sacred about Star Trek is null and void?

No, of course not. Why would you even ask that?

As I said earlier, a strict adherence to canon isn't what draws us to Star Trek. Sure, having a shared universe across all of those shows and movies is in large part what inspires us as simmers to write stories in that universe. And without rules to govern that universe, it would be chaos. Canon is a powerful tool, but it's still a tool.

Consider for a moment one of Star Trek's greatest stories, "The Best of Both Worlds". The first appearance of the Borg established in no uncertain terms that they were only interested in technology, and that they had no interest in the people of the Enterprise. In their second appearance, that changed, and capturing and assimilating Picard was one of their primary objectives. Even though it was explicitly mentioned as a one-time thing for the Borg, it would later be established that the Borg have been assimilating people from thousands of different species. Picard was far from the first. Details of the original appearances of the Borg were kept in broad strokes. The Enterprise met them far away from Federation space. Their ship was cubic in shape. They ignored the crew of the Enterprise until they considered them a threat. These ideas would stick around. But many premises were changed, making the Borg one of the most prolific villains in Star Trek.

In my experience as a simmer, both in writing and as a leader of a community, I find it fascinating how often we get in a situation where we wring our hands trying to write around a conflict with canon, either Alpha canon or even without our sim canon. Sometimes it's a matter of dates not quite lining up. Or a character detail that we'd like to change to better pertain to the current plot. For situations like this, I follow the broad strokes principle, just like the writers of Star Trek. The details aren't always what are important. It's the big picture that matters.

So what does that mean for us? As writers, it means we shouldn't be afraid to fudge the details at times. Although doing both is always preferred, it's still better to tell a compelling story than an accurate one. And as fans, it's much easier to enjoy a work when we're not stressing over the minutiae. It means that we can just sit back and enjoy the ride that Star Trek is taking us on.

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:42:37 PM

I can't remember where I saw it, but I read recently about a conversation someone was having with Gene Roddenberry about canon and all the differences between *TOS* and *The Motion Picture*. His response was essentially, "This is the way it is now..."

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:42:37 PM

For the rest of our time I'd like to open the floor to any other comments or questions. Does anyone have anything that they'd like to add?

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:43:20 PM

One example of where I think that could be helpful for us sometimes is trying to navigate things like the ever-changing uniforms.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:43:48 PM

That one doesn't bother me - military does it all the time now lol

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:43:54 PM

Were the early *TNG* and later *TNG* uniforms actually meant to be two different uniforms or were they just an updated design because the costumes were literally killing the actors' backs?

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:43:57 PM

I was thinking about trying to fit this comment in somewhere, but in my opinion, when there is a dispute in canon, whatever appeared most recently is what is most correct.

[OF] Emu - Fawkes/Loki/Acad 2/20/2021, 3:44:03 PM

I think a lot of people take Star Trek as Hard Sci-Fi but really it's really very soft... the Deflector can do a whole range of things... you can always reprogram everything to fit the needs of the episode

Reminder 2/20/2021, 3:45:06 PM

This is your 15-minute warning

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:45:18 PM

I mean, I think that .. restrictions breed creativity. but honestly, I can agree with in principle, fudging details

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:45:27 PM

...and which of the four or five *TOS*-era uniforms (from "The Cage" to the final episode plus *DIS* and now *SNW*) was the actual uniform?

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:45:36 PM

there is canon that's overwritten by actual tech advances.

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:46:33 PM

Oh, yes...that must have been such a challenge for folks working on *ENT* and *DIS* - how do we make things more advanced than our time and less advanced than the future when our portrayal of that future has created advancements in the present?

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:46:37 PM

I had a whole section that I moved to backup talking about having a window on the bridge, and how the Discovery bridge looks more "advanced" than the TOS bridge.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:47:15 PM

yeah..

I think my only dislike of DIS's tech thing was the holocommunications because DS9 made such a big deal of it.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:47:50 PM

the people griping about DIS not 'looking' like TOS got a shrug from me. I grew up in the 70s, what we could imagine or depict in tv is vastly different

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:48:06 PM

I actually have something on that as well.

Discovery's canonicity has been an especially divisive topic of discussion the last few years. These discussions range anywhere from the setting and details of the plot, all the way to the visual style. Opponents claim that either Discovery is not canon at all, or at least not part of the Prime Universe, the setting established by all of Star Trek up until the introduction of the Kelvin Timeline in *Star Trek* '09. Some of the reasons given include the prevalence of holographic communications in the mid 23rd Century, a technology that was explicitly stated to be new in the latter third of the 24th Century on Deep Space Nine. Is this a blatant disregard for canon? In the technical sense, yes, it is. Holographic communications did not exist in that time period, per canon.

But the appearance of this technology on the show doesn't take away from the scene. If anything, it adds to the scene. Emotional dialogue is always going to be better when the two actors are able to physically be together on the set. Canon purists may argue that Burnham and Sarek should only have interacted over a viewscreen, since that was the prevalent technology at the time. But would the interaction have had the same impact if Burnham was simply staring at her adopted father from across a viewscreen? The creators certainly felt that way. They felt the same way on Deep Space Nine, and introduced the concept of the holocommunications as a way for Avery Brooks and

Kenneth Marshall to act together in the episode "For the Uniform". It should be noted that this was only the second time, and last time, this technology was featured on Deep Space Nine. It was not intended to be a major part of canon going forward. It was a tool used for the sake of telling their story.

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:49:10 PM

I.. don't see how that excuses it at all. Yes, it's a tool used for the sake of telling their story

but *everything* is a tool, from the characters to the lighting choices

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:49:41 PM

You're absolutely right. Everything is a tool in the writer's toolbox.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:50:53 PM

having a problem with holographic comm in DIS b/c of a statement in DS9 makes as much sense to me as having a problem with a female Captain in ENT b/c in TOS it was stated that no woman had ever commanded a starship 😊

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:51:02 PM

There were some wonderful scenes in Discovery that took place over holocommunications. Is it better to put those on a flat screen because the "technology didn't exist yet", or to have the actors actually be able to interact and tell the story?

Something else to consider is our own changing technology. Visual communication was a dream in 1966. Now it's everywhere.

[TF] Equisrider 2/20/2021, 3:52:32 PM

That's the problem with trying to re-write the future...

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:52:34 PM

Are we really not going to see a change in that over the next few hundred years?

Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:52:45 PM

Yes, I think people who are paid to write a series in a pre existing franchise should be expected to stick to the existing franchise's vents

They *chose* to do a prequel

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:53:03 PM

Sometimes, I think we take for granted just how challenging it is to create environments (and tech) 200, 300, 400 years into the future or more.

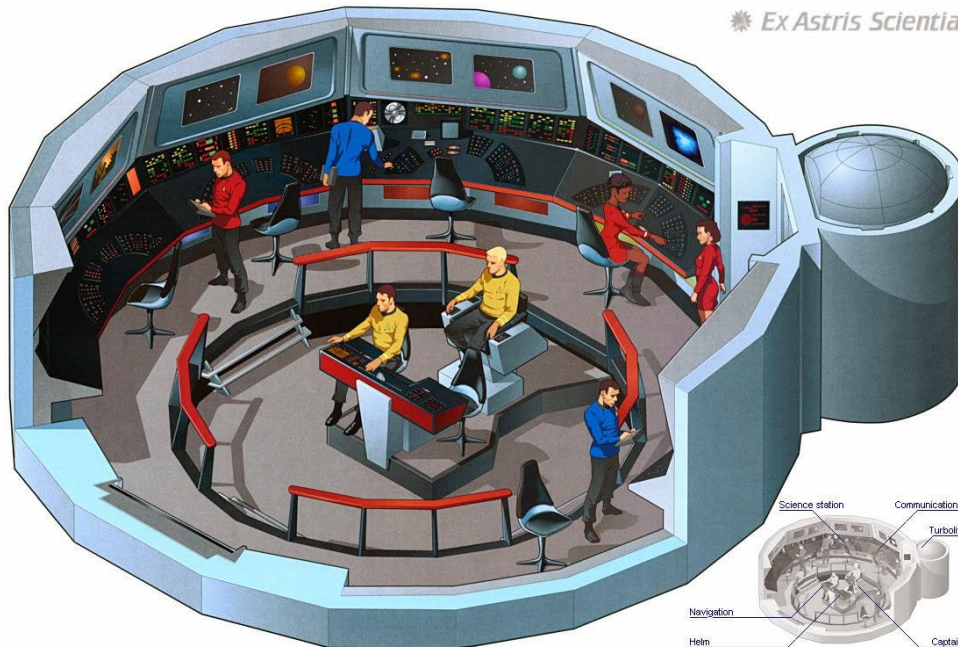
[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:53:26 PM

so neither ENT nor DIS should have allowed female commanders?

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:53:40 PM

I'd like to share a few images regarding the look of the bridge in Discovery. For comparison purposes, I'm going to take a look at the bridge of the USS Enterprise, both as we saw it in The Original Series, and how it appeared in Season 2 of Discovery. First, we have the bridge from TOS.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:54:00 PM



Zhanyt Lafizatar 2/20/2021, 3:54:03 PM

Personally, I think TOS was just lying but honestly, you realize I would have not done ENT or DIS, and pushed both past DS9 timeline wise for that kind of reason?

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:54:24 PM

Now for comparison purposes, let's take a look at a similar image of the Enterprise bridge as shown in Discovery.



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[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:54:25 PM

Imagine if someone living in the 1600s tried to come up with a story set in the 2000s.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:54:45 PM

^That

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:54:52 PM

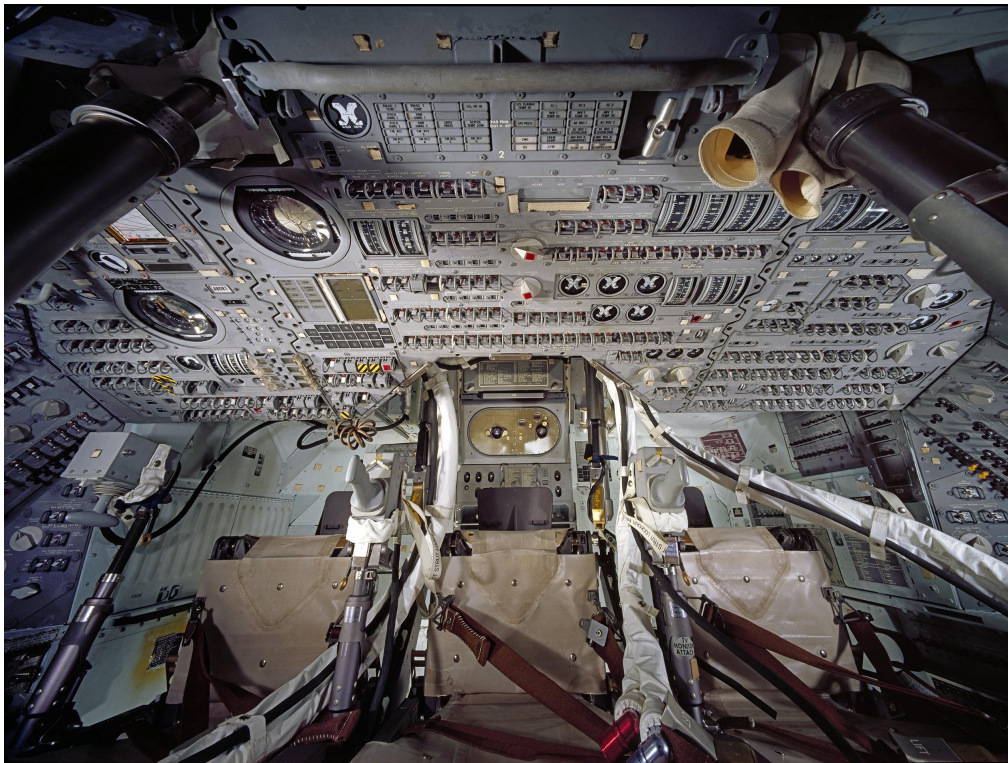
Right away it's easy to see the differences. The Discovery version appears to be larger, and certainly appears to be more "futuristic" than the original bridge. Yes, this is a stylistic choice, and I have seen many fans complain about these stylistic choices, saying that they could have made the TOS bridge look just as convincing with 2016 production values. Sure, that's certainly true. But Star Trek has always been a vision of our future. That set from 1966 was more sophisticated than anything we had in real life at the time.

Reminder 2/20/2021, 3:55:05 PM

This is your 5-minute warning. Consider moving the conversation to the appropriate overflow room.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:55:11 PM

Just take a look at the inside of the Apollo command module, a real life spacecraft that took our astronauts to the moon.



Compared to that, having only a handful of buttons and full color displays was beyond anything that we had in space at the time.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:56:01 PM

But compare that to humanity's latest crewed spacecraft, the SpaceX Crew Dragon.



[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:56:10 PM



[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:56:11 PM

Modern astronauts are flying their spacecraft with controls that put Star Trek to shame. Star Trek is beloved because it has always been a glimpse into what *our* future could be. But looking at our present, can we really be convinced that the TOS bridge is in our future? Or by the real 23rd Century, would we have technology far beyond what is shown on Discovery?

To me, the holocommunications really aren't that different.

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:56:52 PM

Agree

[PF] Gregory 2/20/2021, 3:56:53 PM

Yeah, I read somewhere once that the standard cell phone on the market today has more computing power than both the Voyager space probes combined.

[PF] AlexM 2/20/2021, 3:58:21 PM

I think these are the sorts of things that it's acceptable to fudge. Keep the big details. Keep the important details. But if changing something doesn't invalidate the previous story, then some changes really don't matter. Unless it's the whole turning into newts thing. That you can toss completely.

It's now time for us to be wrapping up and getting ready for the next panel. I'd like to thank all of you for joining me today for this discussion, and I hope you all enjoy the rest of the Khitomer Conference. Thank you!

[OF] Cam 2/20/2021, 3:59:25 PM

thanks - great panel 🙌

[PF] Doug 2/20/2021, 3:59:27 PM

Thanks, @AlexM

Nikki 2/20/2021, 3:59:35 PM

🙌 Thank you, Alex!