



TALKING **STAR TREK** WITH **JOHN BYRNE**

BY BENJAMIN ONG PANG KEAN · NEWSARAMA

On January 2nd, 2008, IDW announced the second stage of their plans for the Star Trek franchise and joining them for the ride through the galactic quadrants is living legend John Byrne.

Byrne will first conclude the Alien Spotlight series of one-shots with February's Star Trek: Alien Spotlight: Romulans, where the comics icon will write, pencil and ink a tale of loyalty, betrayal and intrigue involving the distant cousins of the Vulcans.

In May, Byrne time warps back to Earth of the 20th century together with the intergalactic superspy, Gary Seven in a five-issue limited series, Star Trek: Assignment Earth.

For the uninitiated, "Assignment: Earth" was also the season two finale for Star Trek, the original series. The episode, which introduced Seven, Roberta Lincoln and Seven's cat and partner Isis, was originally intended by Trek creator Gene Roddenberry as the pilot for a spin-off series that never came to pass. In that episode, the gang from the Enterprise also time warped back to 1968 where Kirk, Spock and the crew encountered Seven.

Seven has previously appeared in DC's non-canonical Star Trek comics as well as New York Times best-selling sci-fi author Greg Cox's Star Trek novels, specifically the two-volume The Eugenics Wars, and Assignment: Eternity.

Forty years after his first appearance, Byrne will bring the late Roddenberry's dream to life, continuing the tale of the interstellar time traveler as his Earth-born assistant as "they covertly confronts threats to the past so that they can save the Star Trek future."

We sat down with Byrne, who's also illustrating Wayne Osborne's March-debuting FX from IDW, about all things Star Trek.



BK : You and the late Dave Cockrum were referenced in the script for the final, unpublished Gold Key *Star Trek*, the original series issue "Trial By Fire," as the names of two security guards. Wouldn't that have been an out-of-this-world experience?

JB : This is the first I've heard of this!

BK : You've been a longtime *Star Trek* fan, haven't you?

JB : More'n 40 yar, man an' boy!

BK : Other than *Star Trek*, your love of *Star Wars* and other sci-fi films/TV series is pretty much public knowledge. What was your fascination with the late Gene Roddenberry's creation?

JB : My exposure to science fiction before *Star Trek* had been quite limited. There was a novel I loved and read and reread, *City at World's End*, by Edmond Hamilton, and I had read a couple of the Heinlein juveniles as a kid, but *Star Trek* was my first exposure to the full tapestry, as it were. I was 16, and it blew me away.

BK : You've said that there should have just been "one *Star Wars* and one *Matrix* but without sequels *Star Trek* would have died with *The Motion Picture*." However, should it have gone on to spawn nine other sequels, with a reboot prequel in the making, and four other spin-off TV series?

JB : A big part of my brain says no!! *Star Trek* should never have been anything but a fond memory of a series that lived and died in the 1960s. But that's also very selfish. I don't care much for the later iterations, but a whole lot of people do.

BK : Captain Pike's your favorite of all captains, right?

JB : Did I say that? Hm. Can't imagine when I would have. Ask me now, and I would say Kirk, no question.

BK : Are you looking forward to Bruce Greenwood playing him in JJ Abrams' upcoming *Star Trek* film?

JB : Greenwood has been my choice for Reed Richards for years. Can't really see him as Pike.

BK : More importantly, do you think that the *Star Trek* film franchise is in good hands with JJ Abrams at the helm?

JB : Have to cry "no opinion" again. With franchise operations such as this, previous performance often means nothing. Only the final product will tell.

BK : Were you at all disappointed that Josh Hartnett would not be playing Spock?

JB : Somewhat. First time I saw *The Faculty*, I thought, "Heeeeyyyyy!"

BK : What was your unsold *Star Trek* screenplay – which you'd written at the tender age of 18 – about?

JB : Maybe I should dodge this, in case I decide to adapt it to the comics some day!

BK : Fair enough. But is it true that Chris Ryall contacted you after he'd read about that screenplay?

JB : I don't recall the actual sequence. Chris offered me some *Star Trek* stuff – basically, "anything you want to do?" – and I tried to decline, because my likenesses are so bad, and then he suggested one of their alien races books. I said "Romulans?" and away we went.

BK : Have you been following IDW's *Star Trek* comics?

JB : Haven't looked at them. I didn't want them shading my perceptions, one way or the other.



STAR TREK ALIEN SPOTLIGHT: ROMULANS

The solicitation for the one-shot reads:

Legendary writer/artist John Byrne, in his first-ever full Star Trek work, concludes this special series of one-shots in which the many alien races of the Star Trek universe get their due. The Romulan Empire has a new "ghost ship" that can't be detected by normal means. Will the Praetor use it as a weapon to thrust his people into full-blown war with the Federation – or are his motives even more sinister? A tale of loyalty, betrayal and intrigue, with scripting, pencils, and inks handled by Byrne.

BK : What do you like about the Romulans compared to other alien races like their distant cousins the Vulcans, etc?

JB : The Romulans, at least the original series version, were Vulcans with emotion. It was interesting to see the familiar trappings, with that added.

BK : What does it feel like to be writing, penciling and inking your first full *Star Trek* work since your early illustrations of David Bailey, Hortas, Iotians and Khan Noonian Singh in 1987's *Who's Who* in *Star Trek* #1, and Sarek in *Who's Who* in *Star Trek* #2?

JB : So far it's been a hoot. Paramount made me truncate my Romulans story a bit – I had to remove certain elements that didn't fit with their version of the lore, as it turned out – but so far it has been nothing like the nightmare that, say, *Space: 1999* or *Indiana Jones* turned out to be. Those were the ones that made me swear off licensed products "forever."

BK : How will your story set the pace for IDW's *Star Trek Second Stage*?

JB : I can't imagine that it will!! Contrary to popular mythology, I do not bestride the universe like a god!



STAR TREK ASSIGNMENT: EARTH

BK : Was “Assignment: Earth” one of your favorite *Star Trek* episodes?

JB : Top 10, maybe top five.

BK : The original TV episode had been the season two finale for the original series and was intended by Gene Roddenberry as the pilot for a spin-off series that never came to pass. What drew you to interstellar time traveller Gary Seven and his Earth-born assistant?

JB : As a kid, I just thought it was really, really neat. First, I was a Robert Lansing fan, from his other work. Also, I am a sucker for time-travel stories (which the ongoing – would not be, but the the original series episode was). And Teri Garr was so darn cute!

BK : Did you pitch this to IDW?

JB : Sort of. Chris handed me carte blanche and I said, “How about?”

BK : Issue #1 would start in 1968 and then each issue after that would jump one year ahead, right? What sort of stories will you be telling with each issue?

JB : There is no set timeline. I will cover a number of years – toward the end I want to touch on Nixon’s visit to China, which was in 1972 – but I am not going to be setting clear dates. Anyone who is not familiar with those years might well think all the stories take place in the same year, same week, even. The main indicator of time passing will be Roberta having a different hairstyle in each issue. Possibly a different hair colour, too, playing off the Beta V’s comment that her hair was “presently tinted honey blonde.”

BK : Will there be cameos by Kirk and crew?

JB : Yes. (*How’s that for cryptic?*)

BK : You’ve not hid from the fact that the reason that you’ve shunned away from comics based on licensed properties was because you did not want to have to worry about getting actor likeness approvals. In saying that, would Gary Seven, Roberta Lincoln, and Isis resemble the original actor/actresses, namely Robert Lansing, Terri Garr, and Victoria Vetri, respectively?

JB : We don’t have permission to use Teri Garr’s likeness. Robert Lansing is, alas, dead, so no one has to approve his likeness. Victoria Vetri/Angela Dorian was so heavily made up as Isis, there is really no issue of a likeness to capture.



UPDATE JUL 24, 2008

In addition to his upcoming *Star Trek: Romulans: The Hollow Crown* two-issue comic from IDW Publishing, John Byrne will continue to dwell in the *Star Trek* universe with his 2009 series with the working title of *Crew*, which looks at the shakedown mission of an early Federation starship and features many familiar faces throughout.

The veteran writer/artist is also working on a follow-up to his *Assignment: Earth* series featuring the time-traveling secret agent Gary Seven and his assistants, Roberta Lincoln and Isis.

BK : You also said that there's a possibility of more *Assignment: Earth* stories. Care to tease?

JB : As I finished up the first one, I mentioned to Chris Ryall that I almost wished it was ongoing. He said "We can always do another one!" That was immediately appealing. As it stands, if I do more *Assignment: Earth*, I will take the same approach I did with my *Generations* series at DC, with the second series taking place over the same span of time covered by the first.

UPDATE JUL 28, 2008

"John Byrne is dying to do more *Assignment: Earth*," IDW Publisher and Editor in Chief Chris Ryall said, "but has many, many *Star Trek* and other ideas he's anxious to get out as well."