

The episodes produced during *Star Trek*'s first season in 1966 and 1967 were consistently excellent ... with two possible exceptions ... two episodes that started well, should have been standouts, but feel apart as too many things went wrong during the final scripting and the filming. "Court Martial" was one. The other, perhaps the least successful of the first year, was "The Alternative Factor." Problems with the network over scripting and casting are documented in staggering detail in *These are the Voyages – TOS: Season One* by Marc Cushman. In brief, the script depicted a love scene between a time traveler named Lazarus (to be played by famed actor John Drew Barrymore) and an Enterprise office (played by black actress Janet MacLachlan). After finding out about the interracial casting, the network got nervous. What if the Southern affiliates refused to air the episode? This fear resulted in the script being gutted, and that led to more problems during production.

Wednesday, November 16, 1966. The morning papers were filled with pictures of an historic event from the day before -- after accomplishing the first successful spacewalk, astronauts James Lovell and Edwin Aldrin returned safely to Earth with the splashdown of Gemini XII. The song getting the most radio play was "Last Train to Claksville" by The Monkees. America's teens, in fact, had a sudden case of Monkeemia. The "pre-fab four," as the press was calling them, had the No. 1 album in the nation and their TV show was on its way to winning an Emmy as Best Comedy. However, as popular as the pop music sitcom was, *Star Trek*'s ratings were higher. And out of 90 primetime TV series, the two that received by far the most fan mail were *The Monkees* and *Star Trek*, neck and neck.

Filming for "The Alternative Factor" commenced on Stage 9 for the bridge scenes that did not involve Lazarus. Janet MacLachlan was present, and given a blue uniform to wear. This was the first of many mistakes -- although a relatively minor one. Lt. Masters was originally written as a chemist; as a member of the medical or science departments, so she would have worn blue. But with the change in the script that had her assigned to engineering, red should have been her new color. Someone forgot to clue in the wardrobe department.

Director Gerd Oswald covered 23 scenes and more than 10 pages of script, wrapping at 6:50 p.m., 30 minutes into overtime but otherwise on schedule. All seemed well ... at least, on set. It was a different story in the producer's office.

Earlier in the day, a memo from NBC's Stan Robertson hit producer Gene Coon's desk. It said nothing about the casting but, instead, focused on a plot device used in the script. Robertson wrote:

This will confirm our telephone conversation of yesterday, in which I again voiced objections to this script which has as its premise another "duplicate character."... We have gone over this point many times in the past, Gene, and it appears as though we are only continuing to perpetuate the "sameness" which has been one of the continuing criticisms of our series.
(SR20-2)

This was a curious note to send to Coon on the first day of production. Robertson had previously approved "this very fine story," duplicate character included. But, now, as the cameras were rolling, he was



making it clear that NBC could refuse to air “The Alternative Factor.” And that meant NBC would not have to pay for the episode. The network had found its out.

Within hours, Gerd Oswald, finishing work on the set, received new script pages for the next day. He later said, “The script was so complicated, it was even hard to interpret for some of us deeply involved with it.” (134)

John Drew Barrymore was visiting wardrobe on this day for final costume fittings. Before leaving, he was given the revised script. And then he quit the production.

In a memo from the next day to Herb Solow, Joe D’Agosta wrote:

Between 4 and 5 p.m., [Barrymore] sent word that he did not want to do the role and refused to accept a work call for filming the following morning, November 17. With the cooperation of his agent and lawyer, I told him that he was committed and had to report to work. Mr. Barrymore then became unavailable and out of reach. His reasons were that the script changes had altered his character. (JDA20)

D.C. Fontana recalled, “They recast the lead with Robert Brown at eleven o’clock at night, and that poor man had to be on set with makeup and costume the next morning, with the script he had just read the night before. Talk about lack of rehearsal.” (64-2)

Brown remembered differently. He believed his preparation time was even shorter.

Robert Brown was 38 when he was tossed a live hand grenade called “The Alternative Factor.” Prior to this, he worked often on the stage, including shows on Broadway. In 1958, he snagged a prominent role in the sci-fi movie *The Flame Barrier*. In television, Brown found notable guest spots on series such as *Perry Mason*, *Wagon Train* and *Bonanza*. In 1962, he starred with William Shatner in the unsold TV pilot called “Colossus.” Still in his future, top billing in *Here Come the Brides*, above Trekker Mark Lenard and future heartthrobs Bobby Sherman and David Soul.

Day 2, Thursday. Robert Brown remembered it well. He said, “I got a call on my birthday [November 17] and it was from Roddenberry. Shatner and I had gotten along really well while making ‘Colossus,’ and Roddenberry said, ‘Shatner gave me your number; I hope you don’t mind me calling.’ I didn’t know who Roddenberry was. I didn’t know what *Star Trek* was. It had just started and I hadn’t seen it. But he knew that I lived out in the Malibu colony and he said, ‘Listen, it will take you about an hour to get here. Can you come out?’ So I drove in and Roddenberry greeted me and said, ‘You just follow me back to makeup and don’t worry, we’ll find a place for you to live near the studio.’ I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ He said, ‘Well, you got the part. Shatner says you can handle it. So, after I called you, my office called your agent to talk about the script.’ I said, ‘What script? I haven’t heard anything about it. I’m not familiar with this show or the genre, so I don’t think so. Thanks, but no.’ He said, ‘Listen, you’re an actor, you’re from the theater, you can do this. Look, I’ll tell you what we’ll do -- I’ve got a contract with Shatner that says nobody can get more money than he does, but I’ll arrange something. We’ll pay you what he makes and I’ll put in a little extra myself. But you can’t tell him or else I’ll sue you.’ And then he reached in his pocket and gave me five dollars.” (24-1)

Brown took the five bucks and reported to makeup. He said, “Luckily the costume Barrymore was going to wear fit. And then the nice guy who did the ears – [Fred Phillips] the head of the makeup department – said ‘We’ll give you a special who-knows-what kind of a look. Barrymore didn’t have that, but man I’ll do it for you.’ And out came the beard.” (24-1)

For this day, in his scenes on the bridge followed by sickbay and the transporter room, Brown’s beard was thin, although not yet completely sparse. This would soon change.

With all the confusion, care normally shown in the making of *Star Trek* was now nowhere in sight. For a scene in the transporter room, Lazarus knocks out the Transporter Technician and beams himself to the planet. One must wonder where he learned to operate the transporter. One must also wonder why the Technician seems fine and dandy a minute later when Kirk races in and asks to be beamed down. Blame the

writers(s) and the director. The scene description merely reads: “INT. TRANSPORTER ROOM. Kirk standing on a plate, the Technician, recovered now, standing by.” Shouldn’t Coon have at least written into the script that the Technician is rubbing his sore neck where Lazarus gave him a judo chop? Shouldn’t Oswald have directed it this way, regardless of whether it was so indicated in the script? These were not men who were uncaring. They were men who were men under immense pressure.

When Oswald wrapped at 7 p.m., he was one-half day behind.

“The Menagerie, Part 1” was on NBC that night, as the 11th broadcast episode.

Day 3. On Friday, the company finished the scenes intended for the previous day -- sequences on the bridge and in the ship’s corridors. Fortunately, on this day, Brown’s beard matched from the day before. Again, that would soon change.

The scenes in the alternate engineering set were planned to come next but Oswald barely got started on this before calling for a wrap at 7:15 p.m., a full hour into overtime.

Brown said, “They broke the rules concerning their timing. They were shooting late every day. So I didn’t get home during that whole time except for the weekend.” (24-1)

Instead of risking having a tired actor drive back to Malibu, and further risk him being late returning the next day, Roddenberry arranged for Brown to spend the weeknights in a motel near the studio.

Day 4. Come Monday, filming took place in an area of engineering identified in the script as “Lithium Crystal Recharging Section.” This information, according to the script, was supposed to go on the door outside. The sloppiness continued and the sign by the door merely read “Engineering,” adding to the confusion. Why does engineering suddenly not look like engineering? And where is Scotty?

As the day progressed, the company moved to the recreation room, followed by a move to sickbay. Again, on the plus side, the beard looked the same and the cast were holding well at learning the new dialogue coming down from the producer’s office. But the work was exhausting.

Brown vividly recalled, “I was living a nightmare because I was playing catch-up. I was being pushed and chased every day. A lot of times they wouldn’t do reverse shots; they’d just do over-the-shoulder angles, because they were so late. They knew they’d be going into overtime and they couldn’t afford it. And all this rushing created an uncomfortable feeling. Not from Shatner. He couldn’t have been better. And the rest of the cast was a nice group ... except for the morose man with the ears. And the director was always rushing and pushing me. And he said he was going to call SAG and tell them that I was not a good actor if I couldn’t speed up with all this strange dialogue they were handing me. And I tell you I was going day and night.” (24-1)

Oswald wrapped at 6:50.

Day 5 took the company to Vasquez Rocks for the third time. All of the scenes featuring Lazarus



shaking a fist at the sky, bellowing about wanting to kill the beast, and tumbling off rock formations injuring himself repeatedly, were filmed.

Brown remembered, “Working out at Vasquez Rocks was actually the easiest part of the shoot. They had to take time to set the camera up and light everything just right, so there was time to study the script and plan things out; planning for the rocks – which ones I would climb and how to land on a mattress. Watching the cameramen do what they do was quite special. It was tougher being at the studio.” (24-1)

While the lighting and camera crew excelled with their work on location, makeup did

a horrible job with Brown's fake beard. It was much thicker than in any of the scenes shot on stage. This had nothing to do with whether it was Lazarus #1 or #2; the beard was the same for both, completely wrong considering what we had seen before.

Brown said, "The great makeup guy had a couple understudies -- other people who were dispatched out to location and onto the set at times, who were just sticking it on. And I was looking at the lines. I never had a minute to think about anything but 'What am I suppose to say.' And I didn't really have any clue what those words meant, with the description of the stars and the different universes." (24-1)

No one else had time to notice the beard either. Oswald, for one, was busy watching the house of cards known as a TV production schedule fall down around him. He was only able to cover four pages of script this day and, plunged into darkness at 5:20 p.m., ended three-quarters of a day behind.

"Gerd was kind of an old-fashioned director," Dorothy Fontana said. "The script wasn't *that* bad. It was kind of a mish-mash. It didn't help that the actor was being thrown into a difficult situation. And then the director had problems. 'Conscience of the King' [Oswald's previous *Star Trek* assignment] was all indoors, it was all on the set. This one was sort of splattered all over the landscape, and it was a more difficult show to do." (64-2)



Day 6. The company returned to Vasquez Rocks for a second day of location production, this time at and around the "time ship." Shatner and Brown were again needed, along with their stunt doubles, Gary Combs and Al Wyatt. Nimoy/Spock led the Security Detachment, comprising of Bill Blackburn, Tom Lupo, Ron Veto, Vince Calenti and Frank da Vinci. The beard that arrived this day for Robert Brown was again the thick one.

The sloppiness and illogic continued. One must wonder why Kirk fights Lazarus #1 alone, when Spock and a security team are standing several feet away, watching. The answer: Roddenberry felt that Kirk wasn't doing enough in the episode. After reading the latest draft of the script, he wrote to Coon:

Kirk is leading another search party. This is all he seems to do in this story. Let's get him really involved. There has got to be some jeopardy and danger to our people. So far we've just been walking through this piece. (GR20-2)

So Coon let Kirk get really involved. With all that was going wrong, this was the best anyone could come up with.

Again, Oswald wrapped at 5:20, having taken his last shots on close up, where artificial day light could be shined in the direction of the actors from the giant arc lights. The last scene intended to be filmed on location -- the Alternate Universe -- was never even started.

Day 7 -- an extra, unplanned day of production, back at the studio. Kirk's journey into the alternate universe was filmed where he meets the "good Lazarus," working on his time ship. Knowing Oswald was nearly a full day behind, Matt Jefferies and the Art Department had spent the previous day preparing a section of Stage 10 to pass for the area where the time ship had come to rest. This actually turned out to be more effective, since the sky and the surroundings could be painted differently with the huge stage lights. The direction is better here, as is the beard.

Also filmed this day, also on Stage 10, were the sequences in the “negative/magnetic corridor.” For these effects-driven scenes, Brown wore a fluorescent colored outfit in a blackened room with, as he described it, “black lights on a tilting stage that [they] jostled while the camera rotated around.” (24)

It was badly done. It seemed as if the director had tossed in the towel by this point. Compare the approach taken in the filming to the description of the action in the script. When Kirk enters the corridor, the script tells us:



Kirk is spinning through the terrible white and black and slow motion terror! Grabbing at space that comes off in fluffy hunks of nothing! Suspenseful beats of falling, twisting, then: THE SHIMMERING AGAIN - - EVERYTHING FADES, THEN BRIGHTENS!

We got the black and white, and the slow motion and, in the end, Kirk falling. Otherwise, he just slowly runs up the corridor, then turns and slowly runs down the corridor, then turns and slowly falls on his stomach.

When Lazarus #1 and #2 have their final fight, the script tells us that they are “locked in mortal combat.” The descriptive passage continues:

One of them leaps away, clawing at the walls, trying to escape. The other Lazarus leaps on him, pulls him back, and they fall away together ... the two of them facing eternity ... and we HEAR A SOUL-SHATTERING HOWL OF ANGUISH.

What we got was a negative image of Robert Brown and a stunt man wrestling.

Oswald took his last shot at 5:30 p.m. and, finally, the production from hell was over -- at least, the writing and filming of it.

There was one last fight surrounding this production.

On November 21, 1966, as “The Alternative Factor” was in its fourth day of filming and it was clear to all involved that the end results would be disastrous, Herb Solow wrote to Bernie Weitzman, a Desilu Business Affairs Executive, saying:

I think it is incumbent upon us to bring every action possible against Mr. Barrymore. The tangible damage he has done to us in terms of dollars is something we can calculate. The intangible damage he has done to us in terms of the resultant picture is impossible to calculate. We have had to bring in a replacement actor in the middle of the night; we have had to force actors into scenes without sufficient rehearsals, etc. If we did not take every action possible, we would be acting in a most selfish manner in that we would be condoning this type of activity that possibly would be felt by other producers as this specific actor and possibly others flex their pseudo-creative muscles and cause damage within our industry. (HS20)

Desilu filed a complaint with the Screen Actors Guild. A hearing took place on January 4, 1967. Joe D’Agosta, Robert Justman, and Herb Solow attended. Karl Malden headed the Hearing Board, consisting of Charlton Heston, Ricardo Montalban, Jeanette Nolan, and Donald Randolph.

Joe D’Agosta recalled, “Ricardo, yeah, we were kind of friends with him, because he had done the

show or was going to do the show [in “Space Seed”], so he was an ally. Charlton Heston, I remember, really worked to see if we were just being bad-ass producers; he wanted to make sure that the guy deserved some reprimand. I remember he was being very fair to Barrymore, but ended up agreeing with us.” (43-4)

The headline on the front page of the January 16, 1967, issue of *Daily Variety* proclaimed, “John Drew Barrymore Reprimanded by SAG for Balking at *Star* Role.” Barrymore was found “guilty of conduct unbecoming a member” of the Screen Actors Guild. He was fined \$1,500 and his SAG card was suspended for six months, preventing him from working. Quoted in the trade paper, Roddenberry said, “We didn’t understand his reasons. He didn’t like script changes, but there weren’t any which affected his part.” (145-16)

Actually, the changes affected everyone’s parts. The real villain in the story of “The Alternative Factor” wasn’t Lazarus #1, but an American TV network that had Gene Coon gut what could have been a good script in order to prevent a white man from kissing a black actress.

D’Agosta said of Barrymore, “Poor guy. I wish we hadn’t done that now. But we were bent on making an example of him because it was such an unprofessional move, as far as we were concerned, as a whole, anyway. It may have been Gene -- or Herb Solow, I think -- whose ire was up and Bob Justman and me joined in concert with him. I’m just sorry it had to happen.” (43-4)

Over the next decade, the handsome actor with the famous name continued his downward spiral into failing mental and physical health. The Barrymore legacy continued, however, through his children: John Blyth Barrymore and Drew Barrymore.

Read more about the making of “The Alternative Factor,” including the scripting, the creation of the photographic and optical effects, as well as the reaction from the network and the press. Find out how the episode was supposed to be before the script was rewritten and the production torpedoed. And see the actual Nielsen ratings from the night it premiered on NBC, all in *These are the Voyages – TOS: Season One*, by Marc Cushman, published by Jacobs/Brown Press.