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NOVELS

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This chapter introduces Star Trek franchise novels and argues that they constitute a vast archive that should interest scholars of franchises, transmedia cultural production, and the two publishing genres most commonly associated with those industrial forms, science fiction and fantasy. We take a historical approach that puts Star Trek novels in the context of the larger franchise and offers a simple periodization, tracking changes in publishing companies and responses to new developments in the series, films, and IP holders' direction for the franchise. Since 1968, hundreds of authors have written more than 800 novels set in the Star Trek storyworld. Most of these novels are original stories, rather than novelizations, meaning that Star Trek novels vastly outweigh all other media—including television—in the number of stories told about and set in the franchise's fictional universe; yet novels have gone virtually unnoticed in studies of Star Trek except as a marker of the franchise's sprawling transmedia ecosystem (see Chapter 23). Among fans, too, the novels are typically assigned a lesser status despite their longevity; with marked exceptions, an event that happens only in the novels is treated by Star Trek fans and creators alike as if it had never happened at all.

There are two kinds of Star Trek novels: (1) novelizations—adaptations of an episode or film into a prose narrative, often with extensions to or deviations from the origin text; and (2) franchise novels (sometimes called “spin-offs”), original prose narratives using licensed Star Trek IP. Both are referred to in the publishing and visual media industries as “media tie-in” novels. We refer to these types of non-televisual, non-film works—together with short stories, story collections, and comics—as “franchise fiction” to describe a largely print-mediated ecosystem of licensed storytelling that traverses the media industries and is often considered ancillary to the main driver of capital for a given franchise (see Chapter 24). Despite their secondary status, however, franchise fictions, and especially novels, have operated as an imaginative space for fans to collectively work out the implications of concepts from televisual Star Trek, as well as to identify and attempt to resolve apparent contradictions in the character portraits, fictional history, and philosophical themes of the series. Franchise fiction also helps generate loyalty, popularity, and revenue. It is not surprising, then, that franchise novels have played a key role in the media industries for a century (Scolari et al. 2014).

The near-constant publication of Star Trek novels since 1968 has ensured that beloved characters remained alive in-between episodes, seasons, and shows, keeping fans emotionally and monetarily invested in the franchise. At the same time, Star Trek novels provided a (meager) living for writers and expanded the franchise's worth for its IP holders. While this situation is not unique—consider the stacks of aging Star Wars, Doctor Who, or Warhammer mass-market paperbacks at most second-hand shops, or, for a different scene, the *New York Times's* profile of “peak TV” franchise novels (Alter 2015)—no franchise has produced more franchise fiction, nor produced it more consistently, than Star Trek.

Prestige Economies

Franchise fiction exists within an economy of prestige. Many writers since the 1980s, especially in the science fiction and fantasy genres, have seen franchise fiction as the lowest of the low: poorly written, stock-plot, for-hire work done with (supposedly) little to no say in story, character, or world development. Yet the early decades of Star Trek novels saw a number of well-known, award-winning, and highly respected writers take the reins of Paramount's leading sf license, including Mack Reynolds, James Blish, Joe Haldeman, David Gerrold, Vonda McIntyre, and Greg Bear. But, by the 1990s, the writing of Star Trek novels was done almost entirely by writers who only (or mostly) wrote franchise fiction. While earlier decades made it possible for writers to take on occasional for-hire work as comparatively lucrative side gigs to their "serious" writing, the expanding competitive field of professional sf publishing from the 1970s onward shut out less well-known, less talented, and/or less well-connected writers. At the same time, readers were hungrier than ever for new Star Trek novels. This was driven by the simultaneous airing of three different Star Trek series during 1994/1995 and two a year for the following half-decade. Thus, a stable of writers, many trained as scriptwriters and familiar with the film and television industries, took on the brunt of franchise novel writing. Still, contemporary writers like Steven Barnes, Kij Johnson, Dafydd ab Hugh, Greg Cox, David Mack, and others have made successful careers across both traditional sf and franchise publishing.

Because Star Trek is well known among fans for its politics, it is worth noting that authors often put their novels to political use. Of course, Star Trek novels are as versatile in their political expressions as individual episodes of the series (and films). Thus, it cannot be said that they exhibit any particular politics—and indeed in many cases their politics are at odds not only with each other, but also with the series on which they were based. David Mack, for example, utilized his *Destiny* trilogy (2008) to critique Bush-era wars in the Middle East; leaning in a different direction, Greg Cox's *The Eugenics Wars: The Rise and Fall of Khan Noonien Singh* (2001) presents a shockingly sympathetic portrait of the TOS villain, recontextualizing him as the victim of a sinister global conspiracy rather than a monstrous dictator.

Speaking generally, however, a core component of the novels is their complication of the relatively flattened Roddenberryian utopian politics of the franchise, which generally insists on liberal humanist optimism that imagines humanity having evolved ultimately beyond war, cruelty, and greed (see Chapter 60). While a number of film and television productions, namely DS9 and ENT, also put this ethos to severe test, the novels have always been a space where Roddenberry's boundless optimism could come under direct challenge. Consider as one example of this phenomenon the treatment of Ralph Offenhouse (Peter Mark Richman), a twentieth-century human financier rescued from cryostasis by Picard (Patrick Stewart) in "The Neutral Zone" (TNG 1.26, 1988), who is appalled by the absence of capitalism in the future. In the episode, Offenhouse is the unenlightened stooge who learns better by the closing credits; but in novels such as W.R. Thompson's *Debtors' Planet* (1994), Mack's *Mere Mortals* (2008), Keith R.A. DeCandido's *A Singular Destiny* (2009), and Mack's *Collateral Damage* (2019), he returns repeatedly as Picard's ally. He proves incredibly useful, despite his retrograde ideas and his lack of social capital, ultimately becoming the Federation Secretary of Commerce and retaining the post under multiple presidential administrations. This multi-author, multi-decade reworking of what was originally intended as a one-off minor character suggests those greedy twentieth-century humans may have been on to something after all—or, alternatively, that the government of the Federation is deeply gullible.

Beyond consideration of the labor market and working conditions for franchise fiction authors and the political malleability of storylines that such conditions allow, the quasi-theological question of "canonicity" presents a considerable problem for Star Trek novels (Kotsko 2016). There is simply too much material produced across too many decades by too many different production teams in too many divergent media environments for it to be truly commensurate with each other in a single, unitary whole. As with other transmedia franchise fictions, Star Trek fans have generally adopted a

hierarchy roughly commensurate with the profitability and public profile of different elements of the Star Trek license, with film and television (“alpha canon”) retaining primacy over all other forms of Star Trek production (“beta canon”) (Canavan 2017). This heuristic allows an immediate way to resolve apparent contradictions in narrative continuity, with all alpha canon outranking all beta canon.

As Star Trek novels developed a mass beyond the ability of any but the most devoted fans to consume it all, a sort of “core” of key influential works emerged. We identify some of those major landmarks below, dividing our history into four distinct eras in the publishing of Star Trek novels: the first, 1968–79, when Bantam was publisher; the second, 1979–2005, when Pocket Books took over until the end of ENT; the third, 2005–17, between ENT and the start of DSC; and the fourth, from 2017 to the present, beginning with the TV relaunch of Star Trek on CBS All Access.

Bantam-Era Star Trek Novels, 1968–79

As with many other corporate-owned television properties in the 1960s, Star Trek was put to print soon after its premiere. Paramount licensed one juvenile novel, several story-length adaptations of TOS’s episodes, and an adult novel while TOS was airing—but it was not until the growth of Star Trek fan culture, especially around conventions (see Chapter 35), that Star Trek novels were published with any regularity.

Early Star Trek fiction was written by two well-known sf authors, Mack Reynolds and James Blish, and were consequently also the beginning of the beta canon. Reynold’s juvenile novel *Mission to Horatius* (1968) appeared at the end of TOS’s run with a typical plot about exploring an alien planet—only its inhabitants are just like Native Americans. Blish wrote short-story adaptations of aired episodes, typically based on script drafts rather than finished episodes, released in eleven volumes (1967–75). He also authored the first original Star Trek novel for adults, *Spock Must Die!* (1970), a thriller in which a “tachyon copy” of Spock is created and chaos ensues when the crew cannot tell the Spocks apart.

These were the only officially licensed Star Trek prose narratives in the first decade following TOS’s premiere, but with the explosion of fan fiction, fanzines, and conventions devoted to the show (see Chapter 33), the late 1970s saw a surge in Star Trek novel publishing that never abated. Bantam published the first line of Star Trek tie-in novels (edited by Frederik Pohl) from 1976–81, beginning with *Spock, Messiah!* and including such well-known sf names as Haldeman, Gerrold, and Gordon Eklund, before the license for Star Trek novels passed to Pocket Books in 1979.

Little effort was made by Bantam (and later Pocket Books) to ensure the novels were mutually compatible with TOS, much less with each other. Indeed, the novels frequently contradict each other, especially when separated by more than a few years; moreover, relatively little from the “beta canon” novels has made it into “alpha canon.” The relative lack of oversight by Paramount allowed franchise fiction writers to operate in the Star Trek sandbox with relative freedom, so that while some would attempt to stick to the personality and inclinations of well-known characters, others utterly changed the tone of the franchise. Haldeman’s *Planet of Judgment* (1977), for example, features an abusive Kirk, an emotionally unstable Spock, a female crewmember haunted by an abortion, and casts Bones as a recovering alcoholic. Much of this is antithetical to and tonally darker than TOS, but demonstrates the capacity of franchise fiction, like fan fiction, to critique through reimagination.

In keeping with the episodic nature of TOS, the Bantam novels typically described self-contained missions to particular planets: the crew visits, solves a problem, and leaves. Major changes to the characters and settings were rare; events depicted in the novels would have few or no long-term consequences. Even here, of course, one finds exceptions: at the end of *Spock Must Die!*, for instance, the Klingons are confined to their homeworld without spaceflight for a thousand years by powerful aliens as punishment for their imperial transgressions—a seismic development quite obviously not

honored in later works. Occasionally, a franchise novel would be followed up with a sequel, as with Sondra Marshak and Myrna Culbreath's *The Price of the Phoenix* (1977) and *The Fate of the Phoenix* (1979), creating small enclaves of writer-specific continuity within the larger confusion of storylines.

In the main, however, Bantam novels were produced so as to avoid significantly altering the terms of the larger series, characteristically resetting back to the status quo ante at the conclusion of each story as the *Enterprise* flew off toward its next adventure.

The Pocket Books Era, 1979–2005

This ethos shifted at Pocket Books, which began to develop a loose internal continuity independently of reference to the series in the 1980s and 1990s. By this point, Star Trek had been revived as a media property, first in the TOS film series and then in TNG; the presence of ongoing alpha canon stories required more attention to brand management. One solution pioneered by Pocket Books was to create separate numbered series of novels based on which crew they were about, effectively duplicating the TV series structures and cultivating series-level storylines and audiences. Pocket Books published 97 TOS novels, 63 TNG novels, 27 DS9 novels, and 21 VOY novels between 1979 and 2005. Pocket Books interspersed the series novels with crossover book series featuring multiple crews and several non-series-based books, the most popular and longest-running being Peter David's *New Frontier* (24 novels; 1997–2015) about the Federation's mission to a politically destabilized region, and *Corps of Engineers* (66 novellas; 2000–06) about the engineering crew of the *da Vinci*.

A fan named Richard Arnold, who passed away in early 2021, was hired by Roddenberry after TVH to serve as “archivist” for the franchise, a job which included vetting tie-in materials. Arnold's approach to this work proved extremely unpopular among fans, tie-in writers, and licensed merchandisers alike; he was widely perceived as issuing arbitrary and contradictory decrees, and was let go by Paramount very shortly after Roddenberry's death in October 1991 (Lovett 2021). Arnold's power was by no means absolute; a number of novels including *Q-in-Law* (David 1991b) and *Vendetta* (David 1991a), about the Borg, were published over his objections, the latter with a disclaimer marking it as officially non-canon due to its depiction of a female Borg drone (a concept Arnold deemed impossible, five years prior to FCT and six before the introduction of Seven of Nine [Jeri Ryan]). Regardless, the presence of a “continuity cop” understood to have Roddenberry's ear did help create increased consistency across the line during the early Pocket Books period (for better and for worse).

The first Pocket Books novel, *The Entropy Effect* (1981) by Vonda McIntyre, remains a fan favorite. A time travel romp that (briefly) kills Kirk, the novel also sees Sulu receive both a promotion and a first name (Hikaru, which became “alpha canon” in TUC). Fifteen years later, the story of Sulu's relationship with his daughter would be fleshed out in Peter David's memorable but underselling *The Captain's Daughter* (David 1995), after her onscreen appearance in GEN. Uhura, too, received her first name, Nyota (Kiswahili for “star”), introduced in William Rotsler's *Star Trek II Biographies* (1982) and reused in Uhura-focused novels like Janet Kagan's *Uhura's Song* (1985). The name was widely adopted by fans, authors, and by Nichelle Nichols herself, but not canonized until ST09.

Other major decisions by Pocket Book authors strongly informed film and television production, becoming at least partially canon. These include the chaotic, pre-logic ancient history of the Vulcans—explored most notably in ENT—that was developed by Diane Duane in *Spock's World* (1989), the prototype for the Klingon language in John M. Ford's *The Final Reflection* (1984) and the famously comedic *How Much for Just the Planet?* (1987), and the Troi/Riker romance on Betazed depicted in Peter David's *Imzadi* (1992). Still others—like Spock's discovery that he fathered a child in TOS episode “All Our Yesterdays” (TOS 3.23, 1969), depicted in Ann C. Crispin's *Yesterday's Son* (1983) and *Time for Yesterday* (1988), or the four-book *Lost Years* novels (Dillard 1989; Dillard 1995) detailing the gap between TOS and TMP—inspired multiple novel sequels.

Particular authors became mainstays of the Pocket Book line, writing both official sequels to their own work as well as including references to other novels as background detail. Diane Duane was an especially prolific and popular Star Trek author in the 1980s and 1990s, perhaps best remembered for *Dark Mirror* (1993), a TNG Mirror Universe novel. Duane's *My Enemy, My Ally* (1984), a tale of Romulan political intrigue, similarly remains quite popular. The well-regarded *Federation* by Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens (1994), also remixes elements of TOS and TNG, telling one story of the founding of the Federation (a popular subject for tie-in novels) by way of the Guardian of Forever and Zefram Cochrane (both tantalizing elements of the television series that have likewise often been followed up on in the novels, often in contradictory and/or apocryphal ways). Reeves-Stevens's *Prime Directive* (Reeves-Stevens and Reeve-Stevens 1990) even saw the TOS crew disgraced and disbanded after breaking Starfleet's top rule one too many times; by the end, of course, it all works out. Julia Ecklar's inventive *The Kobayashi Maru* (1989) takes the popular thought experiment from WOK and imagines how Sulu, Chekhov, and Scotty might have each tackled the problem—a story premise often revisited by later authors, e.g. and Michael A. Martin and Andy Mangels' *Kobayashi Maru* (2008), which uses the ENT crew.

By 1995, Pocket Books's beta canon was sufficiently rigorous to incorporate non-series novels and alternate histories; William Shatner's "Shatniverse" novels, for example, imagined a Star Trek parallel universe in which Kirk is resurrected following his death in GEN. Series set in marginal locations at the fringes of existing continuity proved popular following the launch of Peter David's 1997 *New Frontier* series. Among them were *Stargazer* (6 novels; 2002–2004), about young Picard's first captancy; *Vanguard* (7 novels; 2005–2012), set on a space station during TOS; *Section 31* (6 novels; 2001–2017), about the Federation's black-ops intelligence organization; *New Earth* (6 novels; all 2000), about a massive Federation colonial expedition to a new planet; and perhaps most notably *Department of Temporal Investigations* (5 novels; 2011–present), which attempts the impossible task of rationalizing every Star Trek time travel story ever filmed into a single, coherent system. TNG's Q, too, proved rich fodder for novelistic attempts to make sense of the various presentations of his powers and motivations, with frequent revisitations from the comedic (David's 1991b *Q-in-Law*) to the cosmically menacing (David's 1994 *Q-Squared*) to the unexpectedly benign (Greg Cox's 2003 *Q Continuum* novel) to the autobiographical (*I, Q*, co-authored by Q actor John de Lancie and Peter David 1999) and even a cross-over with TOS (the *Spock vs. Q* audioplay performed by John de Lancie and Leonard Nimoy; Fannon 1999). As the involvement of John de Lancie demonstrates, actors were occasionally involved in franchise fiction production, especially as narrators of audiobooks.

In addition to stories focused on one or more of the film and television crews, novels in the Pocket Books canon frequently centered on a single character, fleshing out their backstory in detail the episodic series never could. Novels in this mode include Jeri Taylor's *Mosaic* (1996), about Captain Janeway; *The Lives of Dax* (Palmieri 1999), a short story anthology about the previous incarnations of the Dax symbiont; and Andrew Robinson's *A Stitch in Time* (2000), a biographical story about Garak, based on the acting diary Robinson used to develop the character on screen. Pocket continues to publish books in this mode to this day, now often in the form of a purported first-person autobiography of a major character like Kirk (Goodman 2015), Picard (Goodman 2017), Janeway (McCormack 2020), or Spock (McCormack 2021). As the television cycle of the 1980s and 1990s came to an end in the early 2000s, however, the Pocket Books line more importantly became a place where the adventures depicted in the series could continue.

Pocket Books and the Post-Series Continuity Era, 2005–17

Following the commercial failure of NEM and the cancelation of ENT in 2005, Pocket Books became the centerpiece of new Star Trek production. Freed from the constraints of accommodating ongoing stories in visual media whose twists and turns could not be anticipated by work-for-hire

authors divorced from the larger production apparatus (see Chapter 24), Star Trek novels were now able to make radical changes to the storyworld status quo. Many of these changes were made by a new stable of Star Trek authors brought to the franchise by editor Marco Palmieri in the late 2000s. David Mack, for example, permanently eliminated the Borg in his *Destiny* trilogy (Mack 2008a) and, in the multi-authored *Typhon Pact* series (8 novels; 2010–12), Mack, Michael A. Martin, David Ward, Una McCormack, and others established a new galactic Cold War featuring an eponymous NATO-like alliance between the Federation, Klingons, and Cardassians. Later Pocket Books novels treated the Pact as the new status quo for the franchise.

The post-ENT “freedom” to explore characters’ stories led authors to grow and change characters in ways that episodic television production did not allow. Characters that survive the tumultuous galactic events of the late Pocket Books period are promoted or transferred, get married or divorced, retire or die, or otherwise move to new places in life often quite different from the stability patterned by the seven-year television seasons. To many fans, the novels of this era also had the opportunity to correct perceived issues in the plotting of the series as aired; the multi-authored *Titan* series (10 novels; 2005–17), for example, redresses why Riker, one of Starfleet’s most talented officers, never held a captaincy during the lengthy course of TNG, while Christie Golden’s *Homecoming* (2003) gave the VOY crew the planetside denouement it never had on television.

A particularly telling example of this tendency in the novels is the ENT continuation novels starting in 2006. While ENT had proved particularly unpopular among fans (see Chapter 6), setting the series at the beginning of the Federation held promise. The final season of the series was building up to the establishment of the Federation, but showrunners inexplicably turned the finale into a holodeck story about Riker set during a TNG episode (“The Pegasus” [TNG 7.12, 1994]). Pocket Books “relaunched” ENT in novel form with three novels that explored how increasing interplanetary conflict with the Romulans led to difficult moral decisions for Archer and crew. These were followed with a *Romulan War* duology (2009, 2011) that resurrected Trip Tucker as a Section 31 spy and the *Rise of the Federation* series (2013–17) that detailed the galactic politics of the early Federation and the election of Archer as president. While serving a niche audience of ENT fans, these novels successfully rejuvenated a TV series many felt was handled poorly.

Between 2005 and the launch of a new era with DSC, the retroactive building of a Pocket Books canon—or perhaps more accurately a rebranding—gave the appearance of a unified Star Trek line, though contradictions such as *Star Trek Online*, which imagines a competing post-NEM timeline (see Chapter 24), still frequently appear. In any event, the dominant attitude in Star Trek fandom, however, asserts that spin-off material never “counts” as canon.

Star Trek Novels after DSC, 2017–

The revival of Star Trek on CBS All Access has inaugurated an intriguing new era in the production of Star Trek novels on at least two fronts. First, the DSC and PIC novels have been produced with much more attention to canonicity than earlier Star Trek novels; authors have worked with series showrunners to develop storylines and even been granted access to show bibles and scripts in advance of series premieres. While this process has proved irregular in practice—DSC novels were still in contradiction with the series by the time of their publication—it speaks to a new commitment to brand consistency across the franchise. The first DSC novel, *Desperate Hours* (Mack, 2017), set during Lt. Burnham’s time on the *Shenzhou*, was available one week after the DSC premiere in September 2017; as of 2021, six more novels have since been published, each tackling some element of DSC’s backstory, usually focused on a major character’s pre-show adventures. The first PIC novel, *The Last, Best Hope* (McCormack 2020), similarly appeared shortly after PIC’s premiere and focused on Picard’s last mission as a Starfleet admiral 14 years prior to “Remembrance” (PIC 1.1, 2020).

Second, the DSC/PIC era has seen unusual movement in creative authority from the novels back to the television production. Kirsten Beyer, author of multiple late-era Pocket Books VOY novels, was

hired as a staff writer on DSC before becoming co-creator of PIC; instrumental in persuading Patrick Stewart to do the show, Beyer is also credited with major storyline decisions like bringing back Seven of Nine (Honorof 2019; Britt 2020). Beyer's movement from tie-in novelist to Star Trek showrunner is unique, but it registers the increasing importance of ancillary and fan-consumed material in the larger cultural landscape.

At the same time, the reinvention of Star Trek on television has rendered the Pocket Books continuity entirely incompatible with the so-called "Prime Universe" in ways that have proved insurmountable. Rather than simply relegate the books to the status of Star Trek "Legends"—as happened to the similarly long-running Star Wars Expanded Universe when the franchise was purchased and rebooted by Disney in the 2010s—the Pocket Books timeline was instead given a formal heroic sendoff in the form of the "Coda" trilogy (Dayton Ward's *Moments Asunder* (2021), James Swallow's *The Ashes of Tomorrow* (2021), and David Mack's (2021) *Oblivion's Gate*, all published between September and November in 2021). In an epic story uniting all eras of Star Trek, with a particular focus on the TNG and DS9 characters, the novelverse characters discover that they inhabit a "splinter" timeline whose ongoing existence now threatens the entire multiverse—and, in the end, they must choose to remove themselves from existence entirely, so that the rest of Star Trek might live. An epilogue depicts Benny Russell at work on a new series of novels set in his Benjamin Sisko storyworld, crafting the first sentence of *The Last Best Hope*—cementing the new book line as the core of Star Trek novels for the foreseeable future.

With more than 800 novels published over half-a-century, and more always on the way, Star Trek novels are an important and untapped resource for scholars of literature, (trans)media, science fiction, and Star Trek itself. Any of the novels and authors mentioned here are as readily open to the sort of in-depth, at-length critical writing regularly leveled at individual Star Trek episodes or films. Moreover, there are a number of important franchise edge-cases that bear similarities to franchise fictions and novelizations; these include non-fiction technical manuals, histories, and travel guides to the Star Trek storyworld (see Chapter 27); fan-written short story collections, like *The New Voyages* (2 books; 1976, 1978) and *Strange New Worlds* (11 books; 1998–2016), that blur the boundary between fan fiction and franchise fiction; and unlicensed, parodic pseudo-tie-ins, like John Scalzi's *Redshirts* (2012) or Kevin David Anderson's and Sam Stall's *Night of the Living Trekkies* (2010). Despite their secondary, "beta" reputation, such materials offer some of Star Trek's most fascinating and generative ruminations on the series's longevity, its philosophical and political implications, and its future as a transmedia franchise.

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The Original Series

3.23 “All Our Yesterdays” 1969.

The Next Generation

1.26 “The Neutral Zone” 1988.

7.12 “The Pegasus” 1994.

Picard

1.1 “Remembrance” 2020.

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