

Hey Netflix!
Save Stargate
Universe!



Blake Linton

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Hey Netflix!

Save Stargate Universe!

The same features that made *Stargate Universe* (aka *SGU*) the first television series to be killed by the Internet also make it the ideal series to be saved by Netflix. The disappointing Nielsen ratings that led to *SGU*’s cancellation by Syfy on December 16, 2010 measured only a tiny fraction of the show’s actual viewership.

As epic space science fiction, *SGU* has highly focused appeal to a desirable and exceptionally avant-garde demographic: Geeks, technophiles, early adopters—viewers in the coveted 18-49 age range who embrace tomorrow’s technology today, and who prefer to watch series via the Internet through gaming consoles, laptops, PCs, smart phones, tablets, iPods, smart TVs, etc. Thus, though the Nielsen ratings measure conventional audiences with laudable accuracy, *SGU*’s uniquely unconventional viewers went largely uncaptured, watching in ways and time frames beyond The Nielsen Company’s purview. This gave *SGU* the illusory appearance of unpopularity and skewed its reported demographics.

There is considerable evidence that *SGU*’s audience is large, enthusiastic, perfectly matched to Netflix, and still clamoring for the show’s return.

The Pirate Nation’s Top Show

SGU was pirated in numbers far exceeding its television audience. In an interview published by the ChevronOne website in July 2011, *SGU*’s Visual Effects Supervisor Mark Savelle explained, “I know some people who are heavily into web security and looking at traffic and they told me the torrents for *Stargate Universe* were pretty insane. Web traffic would go crazy after one of our episodes aired. Much more than any of the big network shows. It’s interesting because you know the viewers are out there.”

Savelle accurately pinpointed the cause: “Everyone today is so tech savvy. The viewers that are important to science fiction and our genre in general are very smart. And I guess you can’t blame people for not wanting to watch live TV anymore. It’s too nice not to view things on your own time, right?”

SGU fan Aaron Waldo likewise reported to me, “Shortly after hearing that *SGU* was being canceled due to low ratings, and hearing the argument that file-sharing was killing it, I decided to check it out.... Each [torrent site] I visited that had eps. of *SGU* had a crazy amount of seeders and leechers. I mean seriously crazy! Most often when you go to one of these sites individually, a popular

movie or series that's otherwise not available for purchase has something like 200-500 seeders.... Every ep of *SGU* I found had something in the neighborhood of 75,000-100,000 seeders per site. That's freakin insane!! I was blown away. Cause I'm talking about season 2 eps that weren't available for purchase yet on disk, and season 1 eps that had already been available for almost a year already on dvd and blu-ray."

Published statistics support Savela and Waldo's claims. In November 2010, the Internet Commerce Security Laboratory published "How much material on BitTorrent networks is infringing content? A validation study". This paper presents the results of extensive statistical research into the content of the most popular torrents, the second phase of which was conducted near the end of *SGU*'s first season. During that time, as shown on page 22 of the report, *SGU* was found to be the second most downloaded television series, close behind *Lost*. The measured download numbers are of course relatively small because the study covered only a statistically significant sample of the entire BitTorrent network. But consider that Wikipedia reports the total number of monthly BitTorrent users to be more than a quarter of a billion, and that *SGU* was their favorite or second-favorite series, and it is easy to conclude that *SGU* had an audience at least comparable in size to today's highest-rated big-network shows.

And torrents are only part of the story. In August 2011, piracy news website TorrentFreak reported that, according to data collected by Google for the month of July 2011, cyberlockers dwarfed torrent-tracking sites in terms of both unique visitors and pageviews. Indeed, in TorrentFreak's list of file-sharing sites ranked by unique visitors, even the famed Pirate Bay failed to make the top five. In the wake of Megaupload's shutdown, the balance has more recently shifted back toward torrents, but given that these statistics were collected only two months after the airing of *SGU*'s season two finale, it is likely that cyberlockers dominated filesharing during much of *SGU*'s original broadcast run.

Cyberlocker pirates favor *SGU* even more than their BitTorrent brethren. At the time of this writing, queries on cyberlocker search engine FilesTube for episodes of *Lost* return an average of 68 download sources each, whereas nearly every episode of *SGU* returns 150 download sources—the cap which FilesTube implemented in July 2013 to limit excessive search results. These sources persist despite relentless Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) takedowns and the cyberlockers' own policies of deleting inactive files.

Nor is the disparity between *Lost* and *SGU* attributable to differences in their ages. Season six of *Lost* was contemporaneous with season one of *SGU*, yet season six of *Lost* averages only 29 sources per episode. Either fewer cyberlocker pirates uploaded *Lost* to begin with, or fewer have bothered to re-upload deleted copies.

Meanwhile, a FilesTube search for the first episode of the Netflix-revived series *Arrested Development* returns a mere 14 results. Just before the cap was implemented (i.e., June 2013) the first episode of *SGU* returned some 540 results, comparable to the then-latest episode of top-rated *NCIS* (the May 14, 2013 season 10 finale) with approximately 650 results. Overall, *SGU* averaged around 450 results per episode at that time—more than two years after its last episode aired.

As mentioned earlier, *SGU* is so popular with pirates because of its subject matter. With its steampunkish starship, computer-whiz hero, cyberpunk elements, and hard science fiction themes, *SGU* is uniquely tailored to tickle pirates' pleasure centers. And it is practically tautological to assert that traditional television viewing is anathema to pirates. A pirated video file can be watched on the viewer's choice of device, at any time he or she chooses, without commercials, and at near-zero cost.

This is why no traditional television network can hope to successfully revive *SGU*; it would simply be pirated again. Conversely, a revived *SGU* would be a hit on Netflix because it would therein enjoy the same advantages as piracy. First, device independence: Netflix can stream video to smartphones, tablets, iPods, desktop PCs, laptops, Blu-ray players, set-top boxes, smart TVs, and gaming consoles.

Second, freedom from scheduling: Netflix maintains libraries of entire series' episodes, often numbering in the hundreds, available for viewing at any time on-demand. And Netflix's original programming is released an entire season at a time so customers may pace their viewing as they see fit, not as broadcasters dictate. Finally, Netflix streaming video is presented commercial-free, supported instead by a subscription model that allows unlimited viewing at such a generously low monthly price (\$7.99 in the USA) that the cost per episode approaches zero.

Many pirates express pride in their avocation, styling themselves as freedom fighters in open rebellion against the avaricious entertainment industry juggernaut. Indeed, pirates often claim that they would be perfectly willing to watch movies and shows via legitimate means if only those means allowed them to watch what they want, in the way they want, when they want, at a fair price.

This claim is true according to Ted Sarandos, Netflix's own Chief Content Officer. In an interview published in May 2013 on the Stuff website, Sarandos stated, "When we launch in a territory the BitTorrent traffic drops as the Netflix traffic grows. So I think people do want a great experience and they want access—people are mostly honest. The best way to combat piracy isn't legislatively or criminally but by giving good options. One of the side effects of growth of content is an expectation to have access to it. You can't use the Internet as a marketing vehicle and then not as a delivery vehicle."

Netflix has taken concrete action on this philosophy. When the company launched in the Netherlands, *Prison Break* was chosen to be among the available streams because of its popularity on local pirate sites. In a September 2013 interview with Dutch computer news site Tweakers, Netflix's Vice President of Content Acquisition Kelly Merryman generalized, "With the purchase of series, we look at what does well on piracy sites." Likewise, in another interview, CEO Reed Hastings expressed confidence in his company's ability to convert pirates into customers: "Netflix is so much easier than torrenting. You don't have to deal with files, you don't have to download them and move them around. You just click and watch."

Forbes agrees: "Users with legitimate access to the content they want will generally use that access instead of using tools like BitTorrent for piracy."

Indeed, as we have seen, *SGU* is content that ranks at the top of the wants of a population of hundreds of millions of pirates—a veritable nation unto itself, with a viewing audience larger than that of the vaunted USA—and Netflix's business model and technology can give them legitimate access to it. Were Netflix to save *Stargate Universe*, erstwhile patriots would defect by the millions from the Pirate Nation.

Extraordinary Fans

In 1965, NBC executives rejected the original *Star Trek* pilot "The Cage" with the now-infamous criticism that it was "too cerebral". That same pilot, expanded into two parts with a framing story, won the 1967 Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation. Among us science fiction fans, cerebral is good.

Indeed, we have long prided our intellectualism. In the 1940s our slogan "Fans are slans!" equated the surpassing intelligence and imagination of science fiction fans to the capabilities of a race of superhumans in A. E. van Vogt's novel *Slan*.

The popular stereotype characterizes science fiction fans as male, geeky, young brainiacs—a stereotype based at least partly on fact. Polls of science fiction magazine readers and attendees at science fiction conventions over the decades have consistently found the typical fan to be male, 18 to 35 years old, and above average in the attainment of formal education. And a study conducted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in January 2010 as part of its television series *Test the Nation* found that participants who described themselves as science fiction and fantasy readers scored higher

on intelligence tests than readers of any other form of fiction or nonfiction (and nonreaders as well).

On March 15, 2009, TV Week published an article titled, “Sci Fi Channel Aims to Shed Geeky Image With New Name”. The article covered the Sci Fi Channel’s impending name change to Syfy, and quoted an explanation by Tim Brooks, a prominent television historian who is also credited with helping launch the Sci Fi Channel during his tenure as a USA Network executive: “The name Sci Fi has been associated with geeks and dysfunctional, antisocial boys in their basements with video games and stuff like that, as opposed to the general public and the female audience in particular.”

I for one consider it high praise to be called a geek and dysfunctional, antisocial boy in my basement with video games and stuff like that, as opposed to the mundane, closed-minded, blinders-wearing, imaginationless general public. But many of my fellow science fiction fans took umbrage at Brooks’ remark.

So five days later, Sci Fi Channel president David Howe disavowed, “We didn’t say this! This was a quote by a TV historian named Tim Brooks, speaking to TV Week, which has been mistakenly attributed to us by some people.”

Nonetheless, Brooks’ observation seems well-matched to Syfy’s actions. Since the name change, Syfy has consistently “dumbed down” its programming, canceling its most cerebral science fiction shows and largely replacing them with wrestling, low fantasy, monster flicks, and reality TV.

Syfy is not to blame for these programming adjustments. They are pragmatic adaptations to the changing landscape of television. We geeky fans who constitute the bulk of the audience for cerebral science fiction abandoned traditional television years ago. Syfy had no choice but to alter its programming to appeal to the remaining viewers. Epic space science fiction can never return to traditional television.

The strange thing is that no one seemed to recognize the obvious discrepancy in *SGU*’s Nielsen ratings: While they confirm the science fiction fan stereotype with respect to gender—male *SGU* viewers outnumbering females by more than two to one—they contradict it with respect to age group.

Consider the *SGU* episode “Gauntlet”, the second season finale. According to The Nielsen Company, “Gauntlet” scored a 0.5 rating in the coveted Adults 18 to 49 demographic, out of 1.134 million total viewers (live + same day). One ratings point equals 1% of the total number of television-equipped households, which in September 2010 (the closest date for which I have a number) was 115.9 million. This means roughly 579,500 viewers were in the 18-49 range, while 554,500 were outside it—an essentially even split.

This result also contradicts the age demographics of the Facebook “Save Stargate Universe” page, only 15.15% of whose 72,000 followers in February 2012 (when the numbers were provided to me) fell outside the 18 to 45 range. Granted, this is not precisely the 18 to 49 age range the Nielsens measure, but it is close enough for our purposes, and the difference would only strengthen my argument.

The trend that caused this discrepancy had been recognized even before *SGU*’s premiere. Back in June 2008, a study by Magna Global found the median audience age for the biggest broadcast networks to be over 50 years and climbing—because “traditional television is no longer necessarily the first screen for the younger set.” Indeed!

For now, let’s assume *SGU*’s Nielsen ratings are incomplete for the 18-49 viewers (due to this age group’s heavy piracy of the series) but complete for everyone else. We can fill in more accurate stats for the 18-49 range by using the ratio from “Save Stargate Universe”. That ratio is 84.85 divided by 15.15, which comes to 5.6. Multiply that by the 554,500 viewers the Nielsens claimed were outside the 18-49 range, and we get 3,105,200 viewers within the range. Divide that by the 115.9 million total households, and we get a 2.7 rating for Adults age 18 to 49, and 3,659,700 total viewers. Those are excellent numbers for a cable show, nowhere even remotely near cancellation territory.

And there's more: While piracy is most prevalent among young adults, it's certainly not exclusive to them. If *SGU*'s ratio of total viewers to television viewers is more than 5 to 1 in the 18 to 49 age range, as our calculations above suggest, then it should be safe to assume at least a 2 to 1 ratio outside that range. (Teenagers, being notorious filesharers, likely account for that much alone. And I personally know seniors who are avid downloaders.) This means there were actually twice as many viewers outside the 18-49 age range as we originally assumed, which doubles all our numbers. Yes, we have arrived at an Adults age 18 to 49 rating of 5.4, with 7,319,400 total viewers.

That in turn means the ratio of all viewers to television viewers in the 18-49 range is twice what we thought—more than 10 to 1—so it's unreasonable to assume merely a 2 to 1 ratio outside that age range, which means the numbers are still higher. But I'll stop at this point, since there's too much guesswork and too many variables involved to come to any reliable final number. Suffice it to say that, as with the estimates based on piracy, it's again easy to conclude that *SGU* had an audience at least comparable in size to today's highest-rated big-network shows.

One might object that the "Save Stargate Universe" page's demographics are heavily biased by Facebook's user demographics, thus grossly inflating the young adult age range. Were that true, there should also be a higher proportion of females following the "Save Stargate Universe" page than in the *SGU* Nielsen rating demographics, since Facebook has greater appeal to females than to males according to research conducted by Pew Internet in 2013 and reported in "Pew Internet: Social Networking (full detail)". But the opposite is the case: Males outnumber females on the "Save Stargate Universe" page by a ratio of more than 5 to 1. Similarly, the difference Pew Internet found between young and older adults' use of social networking sites is small compared to the differences seen in the "Save Stargate Universe" demographics.

The same study also found that only 67% of Internet users utilize social networking sites. I submit that most fans of cerebral space science fiction are among the 33% who do not. We fit the stereotype that Tim Brooks described as "antisocial" at least insofar as having no desire to waste our time and effort contributing to the morass of social networking's "pointless babble"—as researchers at Pear Analytics aptly described the largest category of Twitter messages. Dear Netflix executives, you are probably equally "antisocial" in this regard.

Indeed, this is yet another reason for *SGU*'s popularity among its particular (and peculiar) breed of fans: We identify with one of its central characters, the brilliant Dr. Nicholas Rush, whose absolute devotion to science we admire, and with whose difficulty relating to people we sympathize. He suffers neither fools nor idle chatter gladly, and neither do we.

Our disinterest in social networks is why the official *SGU* page on Facebook has less "likes" than those of other series that actually have fewer viewers, why the "Save Stargate Universe" page's following is measured in thousands instead of millions, why the hue and cry over *SGU*'s cancellation was not even greater, and why *SGU* videos on YouTube (such as the Kino webisodes) do not have more views. As a social media site—Wikipedia classifies it as such—YouTube is as much mired in mundania as Twitter, and thus the average *SGU* fan pays it no heed. "Gangnam Style" is not our style.

Ordinary people can watch their ordinary programs on ordinary TV networks. They have little incentive to cut the cord and switch to Netflix. But saving *Stargate Universe* would win Netflix millions of extraordinary fans.

Social Media Firestorm

The enormous backlash against *SGU*'s cancellation must have taken Syfy and MGM by surprise. Heretofore hidden viewers vocally expressed their outrage on social media sites, with the result that trend-tracking service Trendrr suddenly found *SGU* to be the most talked-about cable television series.

Even the august business magazine *Forbes* took notice in the form of an online article published on April 4, 2011, “Stargate Universe Beats Snooki ... On New Social Network TV Charts”.

On May 12, 2011, in an attempt at damage control, Syfy issued an “open letter” to its angry audience, citing low ratings as the reason for cancellation.

But although *SGU*’s Internet viewership statistics were not widely known, the show’s quality was so obvious that fans sensed something was horribly askew, and cried foul. *SGU* producer Joseph Mallozzi joined them in issuing rebuttals, including the insightful observation that recent years had “seen a significant increase in DVR usage and Internet downloads, and a simultaneous erosion in live viewership.”

MGM and Syfy’s Facebook pages found themselves flooded with posts protesting *SGU*’s cancellation. MGM’s remain so to this day, while Syfy quashed the protests by deleting such posts, banning the more persistent fans from its Facebook page, and eventually removing the “recent posts by others” section of the page altogether.

The extent of the uproar is all the more remarkable given the average *SGU* fan’s disinterest in social networks. Indeed, we might each have assumed we were alone and gone quietly into the night if not for the efforts of one visionary who recognized the potential of social networking as the single most powerful weapon in the arsenal of *SGU* fans. Calling himself TheDudeDean, he founded the “Save Stargate Universe” page on Facebook a month before *SGU*’s cancellation—a time when most fans still deemed it inconceivable that Syfy might dispense with its flagship series. The page’s “likes” skyrocketed after the cancellation announcement and still further in the wake of *SGU*’s season two finale. “Save Stargate Universe” soon had the largest audience of any “save this series” page on Facebook. It boasts over 87,000 followers as of this writing.

Forbes again took notice, publishing the online article “Dude and 50K Friends: Serious About Saving Stargate Universe” on June 13, 2011.

About that same time, disaster struck: A hacker gained access to the Facebook account of one of the administrators of “Save Stargate Universe” and used that access to remove the other administrators (including Dean). The perpetrator even replaced the page photo with an image that brazenly proclaimed the page to be hacked, and began using the page to promote scams.

Facebook’s customer support knowledge base made clear that it was against company policy to intervene in matters of administrator control of user-created pages. But *SGU* fans hounded Facebook, filing complaints against the hacker in every way imaginable, and keeping a thread titled “Hacking & FB” continually at the top of the official Mark Zuckerberg discussion forum, and also at the top of Google search results for the words “hacking” and “Facebook” together. Michael Humphrey of *Forbes* joined in, personally querying Facebook about the situation. After several days, Facebook restored Dean to his rightful status as administrator. The world’s largest social network had yielded to the strength of *SGU* fandom.

The community that Dean established with “Save Stargate Universe” took on a life of its own, spawning several other campaigns. Joseph Sardone and his team created the “Save Future Stargate Travel” Facebook page, which under his infectiously upbeat leadership has gained over 13,000 followers. Kelley Hirst, Chad Hansen, and I founded the “Vote SGU in the Constellation Awards” Facebook event page, which recruited hundreds of fans and thus won a sweep for *SGU* in the awards. (See elsewhere in this book for more details.) Afterward, with the assistance of Laurence Moroney, Suzy Phillips, and Chris K. Zellmer, we repurposed this event into the “Save Stargate Universe Letter Campaign” and grew it to over 2,600 followers. In turn, Richard Dickenson utilized the text of the letters (of which I am proud to be the principal author) to create the “Netflix: Save Stargate Universe” petition on Change.org, which has topped 43,000 signatures so far. He also teamed up with Torben Krogh Madsen and launched the “Save Stargate Universe Online Fan Petition” page on Facebook to

promote the petition. In just a few months, it has gained some 1,300 “likes”—quite impressive for a page with such a specialized mission.

Meanwhile, Dean’s own efforts made *Forbes* yet again with the July 18, 2011 article “5 Things TV Execs Should Learn From ShayCarl, Natalie Tran And Save SGU”. And on November 21, 2011, financial news site TheStreet urged Netflix to save *SGU* in the article “10 Cult TV Shows Netflix Should Revive”.

Significantly, Dean’s attempts to save other science fiction shows have been less successful. As of this writing, the “Save Eureka” Facebook page has about 12,000 “likes”, “Save Terra Nova” merely 8,000, and “Save Sanctuary” a scant 3,000. This is further evidence that even though its Nielsen ratings were lower than those of these series (especially *Terra Nova*), *SGU*’s actual audience is much larger and more devoted.

And that’s why *SGU* presents an unparalleled opportunity for Netflix: It’s the only series to be canceled mid-story while having an audience comparable in size to the most successful broadcast network shows. Unlike other shows Netflix could launch or revive, *SGU* already has a huge following. Netflix can instantly turn them into subscribers by saving *Stargate Universe*.

Searching for Season 3

According to web traffic statistics site Alexa, as of this writing the *Stargate* franchise is responsible for more search traffic to mgm.com than all other movies and television series *combined*. Indeed, the overarching query “stargate” alone is responsible for 41.51% of the total. Unfortunately, Alexa allows non-subscribers to see data for only the top five search queries for a given site, which is too few to determine which part of the *Stargate* franchise is most popular.

But Alexa competitor Similarweb provides non-subscribers with bar charts for the top 10 search queries, enough to see that the phrases “Stargate Sg1”, “Stargate Atlantis”, and “Stargate Universe” are all essentially equal in popularity. However, the additional query “Stargate Universe Season 3” also makes the top 10, with the result that *SGU* brings in half again more of the total reported traffic than either of its predecessors. The fact that so many fans are explicitly seeking *SGU*’s third season some three years after its cancellation confirms the show’s continuing popularity. Indeed, many of the searches for “Stargate” and “Stargate Universe” probably also originate from fans looking for new *SGU*.

Further evidence of fans’ search for a third season of *SGU* is the YouTube video “Stargate Universe Season 3 Episode 1”. It is of course a fake, using clever editing and time-reversed footage from the series to portray *Destiny* completing its long journey to the next galaxy, and the crew emerging from stasis. Despite this, and despite *SGU* fans’ disinterest in YouTube, the video has still received over 350,000 views at the time of this writing.

In a way, some of the searching fans have actually found a third season of *SGU*. *Stargate Universe: The Virtual Third Season* is a magnificent work of fan fiction by the same Laurence Moroney who, in his capacity as Principal Web Strategist at Microsoft, oversaw the creation of the Photosynth-based virtual tour of the *Destiny* starship for MGM. He distributes *Stargate Universe: The Virtual Third Season* through his own website, so he’s able to directly monitor its download statistics. He reports that the work has had “at least 350,000 readers. And maybe a lot more.” (There’s no way to tell how many *SGU* fans have shared it with friends directly, as they did with the show itself.) This is a staggering number for fan fiction. A novel with comparable sales would easily have made both the Amazon and *New York Times* bestseller lists.

Even so, fan fiction readers constitute only a tiny fraction of a television show’s audience—especially, most likely, in *SGU*’s case. FFN Research’s extensive study of fan fiction juggernaut

FanFiction.net found its members to consist mostly of teenage girls, a group almost entirely outside *SGU*'s audience demographics. Wikipedia confirms that fan fiction is a strongly female-dominated genre. Ergo, those 350,000-plus readers represent *millions* of fans eager to see *SGU* continue. Netflix would be well served to bring them aboard by saving *Stargate Universe*.

Constellation Awards Sweep

The Constellation Awards are, in the words of their own website title, “A Canadian Award for Excellence in Film & Television Science Fiction.” *SGU* swept the 2012 Constellation Awards, receiving five out of the six awards that a television series can possibly win:

- Best Science Fiction Television Series of the Year: *Stargate Universe*
- Best Female Performance in a Science Fiction Television Episode: Ming-Na for the *Stargate Universe* episode “Epilogue”
- Best Overall Science Fiction Film or Television Script: *Stargate Universe* episode “Twin Destinies”
- Best Technical Accomplishment in a Science Fiction Film or Television Production: Joel Goldsmith for the *Stargate Universe* music
- Outstanding Canadian Contribution to Science Fiction Film or Television: *Stargate Universe*

SGU narrowly missed winning the sixth award only because the vote for best male performance was split between two of its actors, Robert Carlyle and David Blue, both of whom had received nominations from the public.

SGU had previously won the 2011 Constellation Award for Best Science Fiction Television Series. A key feature of the Constellation Awards is that they are chosen not by a select group of judges, but by science fiction fandom at large—or more precisely, the subset of science fiction fans who are willing to pay for the privilege of voting. To cover the costs of the awards ceremony, trophies, celebrity hosts, etc., Canadians who wish to vote must pay a nominal fee. Since the Constellation Awards are intended as Canadian awards, non-Canadians are permitted to vote only if they are members of the TCON Promotional Society—which is the non-profit organization that runs the Constellation Awards and the science fiction conventions where they are presented. At the time of voting for the 2012 Constellation Awards, annual membership in the TCON Promotional Society cost \$11 Canadian, and the voting fee was \$5 Canadian. (Canadian dollars were roughly equal in value to USA dollars at the time, so I'll make no further distinction between the two.)

In a nutshell: Depending on nationality, Constellation Awards voters were required to pay either \$5 (for Canadians) or \$16 (for everyone else).

SGU fans were not only willing to pay to vote, but so willing that they dominated the voting. All of *SGU*'s wins were accomplished by large margins (e.g., a ratio of almost three-to-one against second-place nominee *Doctor Who* in the Best Series category). *SGU* demolished such popular favorites as *Game of Thrones* and *The Walking Dead*.

Of course, the fans' hope was that a sweep in the Constellation Awards would draw attention to *Stargate Universe* and help get the series revived. A catalyst for this hope was the Facebook event “Vote *SGU* in the Constellation Awards” hosted by Kelley Hirst, Chad Hansen, and me. I created many campaign posters for the event, which Kelley and I posted on Facebook walls devoted to saving *Stargate Universe*. For example, a photo of the famous Leutze painting “Washington Crossing the Delaware” accompanied the text, “In 1776, George Washington had one last chance to avoid losing the American Revolutionary War. He picked a fight he could win. Everything changed. Vote *SGU* in the

Constellation Awards. It's a fight we can win. Everything will change." I also painstakingly recruited for the event, responding individually to hundreds of posts by fans on MGM's official *SGU* Facebook wall. I promised that a sweep in the Constellation Awards would send a powerful message to MGM and the networks that the series should be revived.

By the voting deadline, almost 500 fans had pledged their votes by joining our Facebook event. Furthermore, the mighty "Save Stargate Universe" page on Facebook recruited unknown numbers of voters via a direct link to step-by-step instructions I had written for joining TCON and voting.

Science fiction and fantasy shows aplenty have been canceled since the founding of the Constellation Awards in 2007, but only we *SGU* fans have deliberately and successfully spent our money to sweep the awards in hopes of getting our show back. Surely such fans would be eager to spend \$7.99 a month if Netflix would save *Stargate Universe*.

Disc Sales

After the space science fiction series *Firefly* was canceled in 2002, the extraordinary popularity of the series on DVD spurred the production of *Serenity*, a film concluding *Firefly*'s theretofore unfinished story.

But by the time of *SGU*'s cancellation just eight years later, it was impossible for history to repeat itself. Everything had changed. According to Cisco Systems, global Internet Protocol (IP) traffic increased by a factor of 50 from 2002 to 2010—and most of that traffic was for file sharing and video. 2010 is also the year Netflix launched its streaming-only service, prompted by the observation that the majority of its customers were watching more movies and shows via streaming than physical discs. The general USA population has since followed suit or soon will, depending on whose statistics you believe.

As with the audience exodus from conventional television viewing, we *SGU* fans led the way, already regarding optical media as obsolete before the show's premiere in 2009. At the most common size of 350 MB for a pirated television episode, a modest 1 TB external hard drive (readily available at that time) holds approximately 3,000 episodes in a format far smaller, more convenient, and device-independent than optical discs. *SGU* fans have much in common with the alien Krell civilization in the film *Forbidden Planet*, who built a vast machine to "free them once and for all from any dependence on physical instrumentalities."

Indeed, most fan-made *SGU* tributes and excerpts on YouTube—exceptions to the rule of fans' overall disinterest in the website—brazenly sport the Syfy logo in the bottom right corner, revealing the video clips' origins in pirated files created from the show's original television run rather than DVD or Blu-ray discs.

And so there can be little doubt that DVD and Blu-ray sales for *SGU* have been abysmal, and that this is why no Blu-ray version of the show's second season has ever been released. But it's yet another reason why Netflix should save *Stargate Universe*—since we early adopters know that the one thing even better than having your favorite series on your own hard drive is having instant access to it from anywhere and on any device via the cloud.

International Viewership

SGU has extraordinary international appeal. As of this writing, the "Most Popular City" displayed for the "Save Stargate Universe" page on Facebook is Melbourne, Australia; for the official "Stargate Universe" page, it's Bucharest, Romania; and for the "Save Future Stargate Travel" page, it's London, England.

Indeed, taking the number of “likes” from each country and adjusting for their relative populations, a citizen of Australia is 2.6 times as likely as a citizen of the USA to be a follower of the “Save Stargate Universe” page on Facebook. Similarly, the page is 1.8 and 1.3 times as popular in the UK and Canada, respectively, as in the USA. Unfortunately, this method of comparison breaks down for non-English-speakers, who despite their love for *SGU* are less likely to find and “like” an English-language Facebook page dedicated to saving the show.

But we do know that in France, *SGU* is so popular that it was the top-voted drama in a February-March 2013 poll run by major cinema website AlloCiné asking viewers what canceled television series should be revived. When run in binge-friendly format on French television network NRJ 12, *SGU*’s viewership numbers were approximately triple those of the show’s first run on Syfy in the USA (taking the relative populations of both countries into account). And at least 28 fan films and game mods—exactly half of those listed on the Stargate Fanprod Wiki for which I can determine country of origin—hail from France.

By this measure, *Stargate* fandom is also especially strong among Germans, with eleven fan films and game mods to their credit. There are even photos on Flickr of a *Stargate*-themed hair salon in the city of Darmstadt in the state of Hessen, Germany. And, as with the NRJ 12 broadcasts in France, *SGU*’s first run on German network RTL2 attracted roughly three times as many viewers per capita as Syfy’s first run of the show in the USA.

Of course both the French and German television ratings are merely suggestive of *SGU*’s true audience, who mostly watched via piracy. In fact, the disparity between *SGU*’s ratings and actual viewership is likely greater in Europe than in the USA. Piracy is so widely accepted in Europe that the Pirate Party has gained seats in numerous parliaments, including those of several German states. Germany has even limited the fine for individuals found to have shared music and movies to \$200—compared to a draconian \$150,000 per infringement in the USA.

Ironically, the very eagerness of international fans to see *SGU* contributed to its piracy. In many countries, episodes of *SGU* premiered days, weeks, or months after their first broadcast in the USA. Adding insult to injury, international fans saw their online peers blithely discussing episodes, including spoilers, that were as yet unavailable through legitimate means in their own countries. (Even fans who eschewed social networks saw the beans spilled on *Stargate* news sites and pirate forums, chat rooms, and shoutboxes.) The manifest unfairness of this situation overcame any compunctions *SGU* fans might have felt about pirating their favorite show.

Netflix gets this right. As Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos explained in his Stuff interview, “The window of time between US broadcast and international availability is a gap and a problem everywhere. My goal is to make licensing much more global so the service has more global availability. All our original stuff is available on all our international sites and we’re moving more towards ubiquitous global licensing.”

Saving *Stargate Universe* would not only bring new subscribers in all of Netflix’s existing service areas, but also help the company gain traction as it expands into new markets.

Don’t Change It!

Any attempt to “fix” *SGU*’s “problems” and make the show more “mainstream” would be a mistake. Though cast changes will be unavoidable, everything else should remain as similar as possible to the first two seasons. We *SGU* fans don’t want another *Galactica 1980*.

Traditional television viewers decry as weaknesses exactly the attributes that we early adopters hail as *SGU*’s strengths. Too much drama? We admire *SGU*’s frank portrayal of the human condition, of prejudices gradually surmounted, of spiraling descents to the pit of despair and soaring flights to

the pinnacle of joy. Too much dry technical talk and philosophical pondering? We bask in the light of scientific truth illumining *SGU*'s scripts, and share its heroes' wonder at the vasty deeps of the cosmos. Too many music videos? We delight in *SGU*'s montages depicting life aboard a starship as never before seen. Too slow? We relish *SGU*'s measured pace, which grants us time to savor the journey and reflect on the numinous. Too poorly lit? We feast our eyes on the stylishly noir sets that recall *Das Boot*'s claustrophobic submarine *U-96* and *The Matrix*'s steampunkish hovercraft *Nebuchadnezzar*.

Besides, the only way for a network to differentiate itself from its competitors is by actually showing something *different*. Netflix has the opportunity to become the largest, most profitable scripted drama network of the 21st century, but that opportunity will slip through its fingers if it merely makes the same kind of shows that everyone else does. There are already more than enough sitcoms and ordinary dramas, even conventional space operas and fantasy shows. Throwing more onto the heap gives viewers little incentive to cut the cord.

SGU's uniqueness contributed directly to its piracy. Most of us fans have no interest in the vast majority of conventional television shows—and it's unreasonable to pay for an entire cable television channel package just to get one great series. But \$7.99 a month for new episodes of that series, plus access to a library of other space science fiction shows and movies, is eminently reasonable.

SGU's serious, thoughtful space science fiction is nonpareil. Its cancellation left millions of fans adrift, with nowhere to turn. Save *Stargate Universe* by bringing it back the way it was, and we will turn to Netflix.

We Invented You

So much did early *Stargate* fans want a service like Netflix's "Watch Instantly" that we invented one ourselves. Founded in March 2001, as its WHOIS domain record attests, the website sg1archive.com hosted complete *Stargate* episodes for free viewing (until legal action forced their removal). Anticipating the Netflix streaming service that would launch six years later, sg1archive.com offered a library of *Stargate SG-1* episodes (all that had aired to date), allowing visitors to watch at their own pace, commercial-free.

The impossibility of such a service did not deter us. According to Pew Internet, only six percent of American adults had home broadband Internet access at that time. Thus, even among a population of such early adopters as *Stargate* fans, a large proportion of sg1archive.com's viewers still relied on dialup Internet access, with speeds limited to a paltry 5 kilobytes per second or so. Additionally, server bandwidth was much more expensive than it is today. The solution to both problems was to compress the episodes to just 20 megabytes each using the DivX 3 codec. This allowed dialup users to download an episode in roughly the same amount of time as it took to watch it, but resulted in horrific picture and sound quality, and a minuscule image resolution of 240 by 176. And yet, so irresistible did we *Stargate* fans find the lure of Netflix-style viewing that we came to sg1archive.com in droves, surpassing a million visits the next year.

Of course, six years later Netflix launched "Watch Instantly" with superb image and audio quality, true streaming, a fabulous rating system, and legally licensed content. Were it to host new episodes of *SGU*, Netflix would sign up *Stargate* fans in commensurately larger droves.

But there's more: We also helped invent Netflix's actual "Watch Instantly" service! In the course of his work for Microsoft, *Stargate* fan extraordinaire Laurence Moroney wrote the program code that Netflix utilizes to install Microsoft Silverlight—software that streams Netflix's video—on subscribers' computers. (Laurence's impressive fan activities have already been described above.)

And there's still more: For well over a century, science fiction has been a catalyst for mankind's technological progress. In a March 2012 article titled "10 Inventions Inspired by Science Fiction", the

Smithsonian magazine reported that science fiction inspired the inventors of the submarine, helicopter, rocket, atomic power, cell phone, taser, and QuickTime—the latter of which was patterned after the capabilities of the computers in *Star Trek*. And there is a direct evolutionary path from QuickTime (the original digital video software for personal computers) to Netflix’s streaming video service. So without space science fiction, Netflix’s “Watch Instantly” wouldn’t exist.

Saving *Stargate Universe* is a great way to give back to the community of space science fiction fans who made Netflix possible.

Feasibility

Stargate Universe is easier to revive than other shows because of its science fictional nature and brilliantly open-ended second season finale: The starship *Destiny* is about to make a three-year-plus voyage to a new galaxy. To survive the journey, the entire crew enters stasis pods, with the exception of one of the primary characters, whose survival depends on his success in repairing the last, malfunctioning pod within two weeks. The ship is millions of years old, and prone to equipment failures.

It would be easy to change *SGU*’s cast at this point. Killing off any number of characters is simple and believable: As audiences learned in two different films back in 1968 (*2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Planet of the Apes*) stasis pods are very dangerous. Meanwhile, any characters whose actors wish to return but are temporarily unavailable when shooting resumes can be left in stasis due to some malfunction. Such characters might even be able to participate in a voice-only capacity à la Commander Powell in *Dark Star*. The stasis pods might also radically alter some of their occupants, explaining a change in actors playing the same characters, as has happened many times with the titular role in *Doctor Who*. The possibilities in science fiction are limitless.

That said, much of *SGU*’s cast and crew has expressed eagerness to return to the series:

Among the cast, David Blue, Elyse Levesque, Patrick Gilmore, and David Hewlett have all tweeted their support for the Change.org petition for Netflix to save *SGU*. In the February 2013 webisode of Geek Nation’s show *Tweet Out*, David Blue elaborated, “I too have that hope, like hopefully a lot of you do, that the show will come back one day.... I do think Eli survives. I think he would’ve figured out a way to get the power back on and gone on his own adventures for three years or more. And I’d like to believe that’s what happened and that’s what’s still happening, and maybe one day we’ll find out what those adventures were.” On Facebook, Peter Kelamis joined the campaign to sweep the Constellation Awards and thanked us fans “for keeping the dream alive”. And in an autograph to a fan fighting for the show’s revival, Alaina Huffman wrote, ““Save *SGU*’ Please give me my job back. I miss my friends! Thanks for the support.”

As for the crew—the myriad people behind the scenes who make the show—*SGU* executive producer and writer Joseph Mallozzi has made it abundantly clear time and again in his blogs that he’d be delighted to return to *SGU* himself, with the implication that a revival could indeed be accomplished if only MGM and a network were willing to fund it.

The cast and crew have consistently expressed extraordinary enthusiasm for *SGU* both during and after its production. This enthusiasm is reflected in *SGU*’s budget, which according to co-star Robert Carlyle was in the vicinity of \$2 million per episode. This is significantly less than the \$3 million average for broadcast network drama (and Netflix’s own *House of Cards*), and in line with typical earthbound cable network drama. Yet *SGU* is space science fiction, requiring elaborate set and prop construction, location shooting, and visual effects. Clearly, *SGU*’s production crew was inspired to deliver more value per dollar than the crews of conventional shows. They knew they were part of something wonderful, and they took joy and pride in their work. For the price of the mundane, they

gave us magic. They will surely return if at all possible.

Alas, one of *SGU*'s crew who cannot return is Joel Goldsmith, composer of the show's magnificent soundtrack. His passing in 2012 was a profound loss to the world. But during his two years with *SGU*, he composed and recorded a wide variety of tracks that can be reused, and he also defined melodies, motifs, and styles that his successor can expand upon to assure continuity.

The only cast or crew member who absolutely must return is the starship *Destiny*. Her multimillion-year mission to analyze the mysterious structure of the cosmic microwave background radiation from the Big Bang (and perhaps thus reveal the secret of creation) is central to the series, and fans have fallen in love with her majestic lines and steampunkish design.

Fortunately, *Destiny*'s exterior is computer-generated imagery (CGI). It is likely that the data files defining the starship and her shuttles, plus stars, planets, alien spaceships, Tau'ri craft, drones, etc. are intact and can be reused for *SGU*'s revival.

In a way, the same can be said for *Destiny*'s interior sets. These were dismantled and sold after *SGU*'s cancellation. However, they were originally constructed by the masterful designers and engineers at Stagecraft Film Services with extensive reliance on computer numerical control (CNC) methods. This allowed much of the *Destiny* sets to be manufactured by automated means, permitting an unprecedented level of detail. It also permits the sets to be rebuilt more easily the second time around, since the original control data files can presumably be reused. There is little doubt that Stagecraft Film Services would be delighted to rebuild *Destiny*, as they have expressed support for the campaign to revive *SGU*.

Not all the original sets are irretrievably lost. Longtime *Stargate* actor David Hewlett purchased the "full shuttle set plus a few odds & ends" (in his own words) and would surely be cooperative if they were needed for *SGU*'s revival. The shuttle set alone would significantly reduce the cost of rebuilding the *Destiny* sets, as might the "odds & ends" if they include such detailed pieces as, for example, the "apple core" from the control interface room.

It's also possible that not all of the *Destiny* sets would be required to continue the series. *SGU* got along fine in its first season without the bridge and stasis pod sets (because they hadn't been built yet) and could do so again. The bridge might have been damaged during the long voyage to the new galaxy, and as fans have already demonstrated, a bit of clever editing and reversal of footage can be used to portray the crew coming out of stasis.

And remember Laurence Moroney, the man who led the team that created the Photosynth-based virtual tour of *Destiny* on the MGM website? As a result, he's now the custodian of a large library of high-resolution photographs of the first-season *Destiny* sets, taken from numerous angles. These photos are suitable for chroma-key compositing (aka green-screening) à la *Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome*, which was produced almost entirely without physical sets on a budget of just \$1 million per hour. Still, I advocate this approach only as a last resort, as the constraints it imposes on filming style and characters' interaction with their environment are more severe than a series of *SGU*'s caliber deserves.

Nor should there be any need for last resorts in saving *Stargate Universe*. Rebuilding the *Destiny* sets in their full glory is easily worth every penny it will cost. And there's even a way Netflix can do it without spending its own money:

Crowdfund Stargate Universe!

With over \$24 million raised at the time of this writing, the online game *Star Citizen*'s crowdfunding campaign has shattered all records and dwarfed the much-trumpeted \$5.7 million *Veronica Mars* movie campaign.

Why? Because *Star Citizen* is set in the milieu of space science fiction, the genre whose audience most exemplifies the fanaticism for which the words “fan” and “fandom” were coined.

We space science fiction fans invented television-based fanzines, fan films, conventions, and computer games decades ago. (*Super Star Trek* was the pièce de résistance that propelled *BASIC Computer Games* to become the first million-copy-bestselling computer book.) We create elaborate “wiki” websites, scrutinize freeze-frames, and vigorously debate issues of canonicity, scientific accuracy, and lore consistency. Our dedication has become a cultural meme, documented in *Trekkies* and parodied in *Galaxy Quest* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

In fact, a small trial run of *SGU* crowdfunding has already been conducted: We *SGU* fans proved more willing than audiences of any other series—including the popular *Game of Thrones* and *The Walking Dead*—to pay up to \$16 per person to vote in the Constellation Awards, with the result that *SGU* swept the awards in 2012. (See the section on the Constellation Awards for more details.) We paid because we hoped a sweep in the Constellation Awards would help convince MGM and the networks to revive *SGU*. And if we *SGU* fans were willing to spend thousands of dollars on a vague hope of bringing back the show, we’ll spend *millions* if given a real opportunity.

Indeed, if I had a dime for every time I’ve seen fans on Facebook promise to contribute if someone would launch a Kickstarter campaign to fund *SGU*’s revival, I’d probably have enough money to save the series myself. In the counterculture of space science fiction fans, the direct, grassroots nature of crowdfunding is infinitely more palatable than the exorbitant cable fees of faceless megacorporations.

In his blog, *SGU* executive producer Joseph Mallozzi has expressed eagerness to cooperate with a crowdfunding campaign: “I, for one, would be more than happy to send you a signed script, arrange a set visit, or deck you out in prosthetics before blasting you out an airlock if it would ensure your support.”

He has the right idea. As *Star Citizen* demonstrated, it’s important to offer desirable rewards at each donation level. Low level rewards might include digital downloads of the *SGU* soundtrack, scripts, Flash apps used for the show’s display screen animations, and the magnificent blueprints and concept art from the pilot episode’s art department package, as well as inexpensive physical products like Icarus Base badges, ID cards, and stickers, “I SAVED *SGU*” and “YOU ARE HERE” T-shirts, and autographed photos, scripts, etc. High level rewards might include tours of the Destiny sets, a chance to watch filming in progress, lunch in the Destiny mess hall, screen-used props, and mentions of donators’ names in end credits or even on the show itself: “I remember reading a paper by Dr. Blake Linton that proposed a theory which might explain this phenomenon.” Higher still would be appearances as extras on the show, small speaking parts, and starring roles in Kino webisodes. Appearing in *SGU* would be the ultimate form of cosplay—another activity for which space science fiction fans have been renowned for more than a century.

Star Citizen also demonstrated the importance of “stretch goals”. There should be a relatively easily reachable minimum goal for a no-frills, bare-bones return of *SGU*, perhaps in the form of a very short season of heavily green-screened episodes. For each 500,000 or million dollars attained beyond that, there should be a promised improvement, such as set reconstruction, location shooting, more episodes, additional cast members returning, favorite cast members guaranteed, etc., all the way up to a continuation of the series in as close to its original form as possible. If, as happened with *Star Citizen*, the campaign exceeds even the highest stretch goal, Netflix can add more goals, perhaps additional seasons, a Kino webisode series, or a guaranteed number of episodes to wrap up the story in the event of cancellation.

Again as *Star Citizen* proved, the campaign must keep its audience engaged. There should be a website where current progress toward the goals is displayed and continuously updated, where blogs and videos about the production are made available to the public, and where fans can discuss the

revival effort in a forum. Teaser trailers and interviews with cast and crew members excited about returning to *SGU* should be showcased. Preproduction should very visibly commence when the first goal is attained (or earlier), not when the campaign ends, especially since it's likely that if handled correctly the campaign will *never* end. Videos should be made (and immediately released) documenting the production effort, including such elements as set reconstruction, re-creation of costumes and props, and visual and audio effects work.

If he's available and amenable, David Blue would be a superb host to present these videos and interview the production crew. We *SGU* fans universally love him (perhaps because both his character and real-life persona have commonalities with us) and he has proven ability with vlogging. His character even had a similar role within *SGU*, producing his own ongoing video documentary about *Destiny* and her crew.

A secondary benefit of crowdfunding *SGU* is that the results serve as a measure of the show's popularity and probability of success on Netflix. The cost of the website and teasers mentioned above are negligible compared to making the show itself, giving Netflix a way to test the waters before committing significant funds. Should the campaign fail, Netflix bows out gracefully with little money lost, and much respect gained for trying.

But the campaign won't fail. Space Adventures and Virgin Galactic have already sold hundreds of millions of dollars worth of space flights to tourists, at prices ranging from \$200,000 to \$150 million a passenger. The website chronicling the adventures of one these tourists, Dr. Charles Simonyi, has drawn 33 million visitors. And when the Mars One Foundation called for volunteers to colonize Mars, over 200,000 would-be emigrants applied for some 40 astronaut-candidate positions. People desperately want to see space, and for those who are not wealthy or lucky enough to do so in person, saving *Stargate Universe* is the next best way to show it to them.

Space Science Fiction is Forever

When *Stargate* actor David Hewlett signed the Change.org petition for Netflix to revive *SGU*, he included the comment, "Because *Stargate* fans are not only the best, they are forever!"

Indeed, in January 2012, smart DVR maker TiVo posted the article "Stargate SG-1, Atlantis, and Universe Still Live On Thanks to TiVo" about the remarkably high viewership of *SGU* (and, to a lesser degree, its predecessors) in re-runs among TiVo users. TiVo considered this viewership especially impressive because the networks on which the shows were recorded did not promote them, and played them during the wee hours of the night, such as 2am to 5am.

In general, reruns of quality space science fiction shows consistently enjoy continuing popularity long after those of other genres are forgotten:

Almost half a century after its debut, the original *Star Trek* still earns profits in the form of reruns, downloads, and video streams. By 1987, syndicated reruns alone had earned Paramount more than five times the series' entire budget, and by 1994 those reruns continued to play in 94% of the USA. The series is available on Netflix today, with over 1.3 million customer ratings.

Doctor Who has enjoyed similar success both in the UK and internationally, its reruns becoming a staple of PBS stations in the USA. As of this writing, hundreds of episodes up to 50 years old are available for streaming and/or download through Amazon Prime.

More than two decades after its premiere, *Babylon 5* reruns continue to air around the world in such diverse locales as the UK, Sweden, and Fiji. The series is also downloadable from Amazon.com and iTunes.

After its cancellation more than a decade ago, *Firefly*'s success in reruns and DVD sales led to revival in the form of the feature film *Serenity*. As of this writing, *Firefly* is available via streaming

video through both Amazon Prime and Netflix, the latter sporting over 3 million customer ratings for the show.

The *Stargate* franchise itself has performed impressively on Netflix, attaining a total of over 11 million customer ratings (DVD and streaming combined) averaging 4 stars out of 5 before the (unexplained) removal of its streaming episodes from Netflix USA. Over a million of these ratings were for *SGU*, and ranked it the best part of the entire franchise.

Distressingly, most of *SGU*'s Netflix customer ratings were lost at least once due to one or more database rollbacks to correct glitches in the episode order. The numbers were climbing again at the time of *SGU*'s removal from Netflix streaming, but we fans fear that the rollback(s) combined with lost viewers due to the episode ordering problems may have misled Netflix's executives to believe the show was unpopular with their customers.

Regardless, saving *Stargate Universe* would repay Netflix's investment many times over not only in the short term but also for decades to come.

For All Mankind or Why *Stargate Universe* Deserves to be Saved

I have deliberately held back this section because I want to make clear that saving *SGU* is first and foremost a sound business decision. Netflix's primary mission, like every corporation's, is to profit its shareholders, and rightfully so.

But every corporation should also have the secondary mission of serving the greater good. As Google eloquently stated in the prospectus for its 2004 IPO, "We believe strongly that in the long term, we will be better served—as shareholders and in all other ways—by a company that does good things for the world even if we forgo some short term gains."

SGU is the finest example of a storytelling archetype of grand adventure, dating back three millennia to Homer's *The Odyssey*: A lost ship's crew wanders uncharted realms, stopping to explore strange lands and face exotic perils, all the while desperately seeking a way home. Such tales inspire a sense of wonder at the majesty and diversity of the unknown.

But by the 20th century, Earth had been thoroughly mapped and cataloged, leaving little room for wonder in the mind of Man. Space science fiction changed all that by moving the story's setting to the cosmic ocean, a realm infinitely vaster than the droplet that was Homer's deep blue sea. This reimagining has been presented through the medium of television in *Lost in Space*, *Space: 1999*, and *Star Trek: Voyager*, but never so sublimely as in *Stargate Universe*.

For where its predecessors occupy the breadth of but a single brush stroke, *Stargate Universe* is a masterpiece painted across the entire canvas of the cosmos, and its palette is nothing less than the sum total of human knowledge. As spoke Dr. Morbius in *Forbidden Planet*: "Prepare your minds for a new scale of physical scientific values, gentlemen."

SGU's heroes are accidentally hurled billions of light years—halfway across the universe—to be stranded aboard *Destiny*, a starship launched by a lost civilization eons ago on a programmed course through countless galaxies. Its mission is to map a mysterious pattern (too subtle for our own primitive instruments to detect) in the cosmic microwave background radiation left over from the Big Bang. This pattern is surely connected to the secret of creation, and might even be, as one character suggests, "evidence of an intelligence present at the beginning of time." Whether that intelligence is God or something more amenable to scientific explanation is the subject of scintillating debate. *SGU* ponders the greatest questions of all: Who are we? How did we come to be? That is reason enough to save this show.

Yet there are other equally compelling reasons. Unlike its antecedents, *SGU* is more than mere

space opera. No less a literary titan than Edgar Allan Poe contended that, to be taken seriously, space science fiction must strive for “*verisimilitude*, in the application of scientific principles.” *SGU* accomplishes this through the meticulous research of its screenwriters and the efforts of its science consultant, geophysicist Mika McKinnon.

Here are examples: In the very first episode, scientists incorporate an intractable mathematical problem into a computer game in hopes that players will solve it—a storyline likely based on the real-world *Foldit* game, whose players have solved a biochemical problem that stumped AIDS researchers for 15 years. To restore *Destiny*’s life support system, our heroes search a planet for granular limestone, planning to utilize its carbon dioxide sequestration properties. Aerobraking and slingshot maneuvers are realistically used to alter spaceship trajectories and relative velocities. When it appears the crew will have to abandon *Destiny*, they worry that the nearby habitable planets in the “Goldilocks zone” (neither too hot nor too cold) are orbiting so close to their red dwarf star that they must be tidally locked—one side always facing the sun—with consequent geological instability due to tidal stresses. After the crew contract a deadly plague from contaminated drinking water, they find a cure in the venom of alien creatures—an idea grounded in real-world experiments demonstrating the antibacterial effects of venom from snakes, scorpions, bees, etc. When the ship’s systems are disrupted, the endangered crew discovers the cause to be periodic radiation bursts from a nearby binary pulsar—an actual astrophysical phenomenon. Atmospheric super-rotation, similar to that of Venus and Titan in our own solar system, causes a shuttle to crash-land on a planet. With beautiful realism, a scientist describes a deadly alien organism as having “properties of both [plants and animals], like coral, except its growth rate smacks right up against the laws of thermodynamics.” Rejection of a transplanted kidney is prevented by also transplanting bone marrow stem cells from the donor to produce mixed chimerism, a sort of double immune system—a procedure currently in clinical trials.

McKinnon herself painstakingly authored the mathematical formulas often seen scrawled across *SGU*’s whiteboards, blackboards, corridor walls, and papers, ensuring their actual relevance to their context. Indeed, mathematicians and other scientists are the most central of *SGU*’s heroes—a point that should resonate with Netflix CEO Reed Hastings, who is not only a prize-winning mathematician and computer scientist, but who also has taught mathematics and remains a champion of education. Surely he would agree that the best drama not only entertains but also educates. By weaving genuine science into its stories, *SGU* accomplishes both.

Yet, for all its science and far-flung space adventure, *SGU* remains accessible. Its starship *Destiny* is populated not by men and women distanced from us by futuristic or otherworldly lives and values, but by people like us, from today’s Earth, who react as we would to their predicaments. Like no other series before it, *SGU* puts *us* aboard a starship, and rightly devotes much of its time to our challenges in coping not only with the grandeur and danger of the cosmos, but also with each other. And despite our differences, we ultimately find common ground and work together—even cooperating with alien races inhabiting the farthest reaches of space. *SGU* teaches tolerance on a cosmic scale, the finest message drama can convey, and a vital one if we are destined to become citizens of the stars.

For that is our ultimate purpose: To reach for the stars, witness the magnificence of the universe, and thereby give *it* purpose. In the words of Carl Sagan, “We are a way for the cosmos to know itself.” Indeed, many of the crew eventually realize that pursuing *Destiny*’s mission is more important than returning home. By giving a glimpse of what might be out there, *SGU* inspires *us* to pursue *our* destiny.

Yes, saving *Stargate Universe* will profit Netflix. But it’s also the right thing to do for all mankind.

HERE MEN FROM THE PLANET EARTH
FIRST SET FOOT UPON THE MOON
JULY 1969, A.D.
WE CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND
—Apollo 11 lunar plaque

About the Author

Born in Houston in 1964, I grew up watching *Star Trek* reruns every night. It was the most serious, realistic space science fiction television series ever created. Since nothing else approached its quality, I watched it time and again, year after year. Little did I know that I was part of a growing audience millions strong, and that we would one day achieve the revival of the marvelous universe Gene Roddenberry had created.

My situation today is similar. *SGU* has elevated space science fiction to new heights of dramatic and scientific verisimilitude. I've watched all 40 episodes countless times, and will continue to do so, since most other shows only remind me how much better *SGU* was. I feel like one of the Doctor's companions, dumped back on Earth to live out a mundane life after glimpsing the wonders of the cosmos.

But this time around, thanks to the miracle of the Internet, I know there are millions of others like me, and we are empowered to cooperate like never before. Surely we can get this magnificent series back into production!

I'm also the writer/director/producer of *The Cancellation Effect*, the animated space science fiction parody series dedicated to saving *SGU*. These and other videos devoted to the same cause are available on my YouTube channel, BlakeLinton. I've composed and performed music as well; the end credits theme for the first eight episodes of *The Cancellation Effect* is "Blue Planet" from my album *Songs of the Swirling Seas*. Its space-themed sibling is *Songs of the Starry Skies*. Outside the realms of space and science fiction, I'm a co-author of the children's fantasy novel *The Witch's Star*.