



Starship Farragut: For Want of a Nail

An amateur Star Trek episode boldly goes where ... well ... frankly, a whole lot of people have gone before

- ▶ Starship Farragut: For Want of a Nail
- ▶ Starring John Broughton, Michael Bednar, Holly Bednar, Paul R. Sieber
- ▶ Written and directed by Mark Hildebrand
- ▶ Farragut Films
- ▶ Available for free download on www.starshipfarragut.com



By Adam-Troy Castro

IT'S JUST ANOTHER DAY for the crew of the Constitution-class starship *Farragut*, which flies its own mission of diplomacy and discovery at the same time as the original adventures of the much more celebrated *U.S.S. Enterprise*.

I show my own fan solidarity by grading on the curve.

Carrying Capt. John Thomas Carter (Broughton) and a loyal crew that includes Cmdr. Robert Tacket (Michael Bednar) and Lt. Cmdr. Michelle Ronata Smithfield (Holly Bednar), the *Farragut* now finds itself making first contact with the Solonai, a race that (in a budgetary touch true to the original series) seems to consist in its entirety of about five people.

The Solonai have technology they wish to discuss with the Federation. But the first diplomatic mission goes awry when an apparent transporter malfunction strands the captain and his landing party in what seems to be Earth's past: specifically, the height of the American Revolutionary War.

Taken prisoner by the Colonials, and stunned by an actual meeting with Gen. Washington himself ("special guest star" Mark Hildebrand), the stranded Starfleet officers manage to explain away their odd clothing and unexplained presence in the middle of a war zone by identifying themselves as lost diplomats from a distant country nobody has ever heard of.

The situation is complicated even further when one of the Solonai technicians, Batarus (Arthur Thomas), also turns up in Earth's past, deathly ill from the unfamiliar environment and so scarlet from fever that the rebels mistake him for the Jersey Devil.

Capt. Carter's problem: How does he set history back on its right course?

Meanwhile, back in Federation times, the *Farragut's* remaining officers team up with the Solonai ruling council to jigger a solution to this time-spanning conundrum.

It all leads up to a final shot linking this story to another notorious in *Trek* lore.

Made with love, but also with warts

The prime directive in reviewing an artifact like *Starship Farragut* is not to be too big a jackass about it. This is, after all, a fan product conceived by amateurs and performed by amateurs, out of sheer love for the material, which renders significantly beside the point any observation that the acting on display here is worse than any professional production this reviewer has ever covered, even when those professionals were downright bad at their jobs.



This is a factual statement, with no snark intended. This reviewer has mocked crap horror movies in this space, for line readings **just as unnatural**, and had great fun doing it, without conscience pangs. Making the same observation for this (you should only excuse the expression) enterprise, the product of people who were just having fun, is gonna bother me all day. So it's difficult not to provide heartfelt further apology for critical dickery, even with the obligation to elaborate on that flaw with observations like (picking one out of many thespic weaknesses at random) that, though William Shatner has been frequently mocked for all the dramatic pauses and odd inflections that flavored his performances as Capt. Kirk, they were very much attempts to imbue his character's bombast with additional weight, and not, as often seems the case for the players here, interludes adrift as they struggle to remember the rest of a scripted line. It's not just technobabble that flummoxes them. Alas, these performers are just as much at sea in moments of character interaction as they are in exchanging Treky exposition. It's nails-on-a-blackboard time. There are no exceptions. Again, noting this provides the reviewer no pleasure. He's just reporting facts.

That truly unpleasant duty out of the way, what have the people behind *Farragut* gotten right? Well, they absolutely nailed the look. The bridge set is flawless; it may look cheesy to our modern-day eyes, but it's precisely the same kind of cheesy we now see in the original series, and it would have been perfectly acceptable on the original *Trek*. The costumes and subsidiary sets have all been manufactured with the same degree of fidelity. The CGI inserts of the *Farragut* maneuvering to and fro are, of course, highly superior to anything the original *Trek* had, and they give the episode a sheen that Roddenberry and company would have envied at the time. Beyond that, the re-creation is so very exact that it even includes the cute little music tag that celebrated those occasions where some member of the original crew ended a scene with a sufficiently whimsical quip: and yes, it plays on cue, at the same time it would have in 1967.

As for the teleplay, it's very much the kind of thing the original *Trek* might have done, except that the original *Trek* would have done it better. One also wishes this version had been told with more story economy—Gen. Washington certainly has plenty of time to keep dropping in on his prisoners every few minutes—but then we would likely think the same thing in a genuine 40-year-old television episode as well. It's not great, or even particularly good, but it has a few interesting moments, they had fun making it, and they're offering it to you for free. So there's no point in kicking it ad infinitum. If you're part of the intended audience, you know who you are. As for me, I show my own fan solidarity by grading on the curve.

Apparently, in Kirk's time, all Starship medical officers were grumpy. —Adam-Troy