

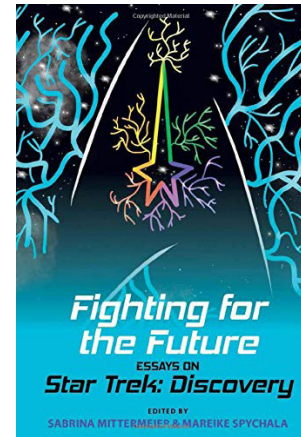
### *Fighting for the Future: Essays on Star Trek Discovery*, edited by Sabrina Mittermeier and Marieke Spychala



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*Star Trek* is one of the world's longest running science fiction franchises, yet it has attracted relatively little academic attention considering its longevity and transmedia presence. *Fighting for the Future: Essays on Star Trek Discovery* is the first critical study of *Star Trek: Discovery*, the franchise's first small screen output in over a decade. The essays in this volume cover the show's first two seasons, across four themed sections that offer studies on the role of *Discovery* within the *Star Trek* franchise, different forms of storytelling both in canon and fanon, the negotiation of otherness, and queer readings of the show. It is especially useful that this collection considers *Discovery* within the larger franchise as well as a specifically post-network *Star Trek*. Valuable points are made on this topic by Michael G. Robinson, who identifies key aspects of *Discovery* in relation to its contemporaries in sci-fi television. Robinson's essay, "These are the Voyages?: The Post-Jubilee *Trek* Legacy on the *Discovery*, the *Orville*, and the *Callister*," performs an in-depth industrial analysis of *Discovery*'s production, distribution, and consumption, and makes an effective comparison between *Discovery*, *The Orville* (2017-) and the *Black Mirror* episode "Callister" (2017) in terms of which is most "Trek," identifying their various complexities.



Other highlights in the collection include Will Tattersdill's "Discovery and the Form of Victorian Periodicals," which compares *Discovery*'s serialized structure with that of Victorian periodicals, featuring strong references to wider generic and narrative tendencies as well as consumer understanding. Another insightful discussion of consumer engagement comes from editors Sabrina Mittermeier and Marieke Spychala, who in "Never Hide Who You Are: Queer Representation and Activism in *Star Trek: Discovery*," analyze queer representation and advocacy. Their succinct yet detailed argument of queer representation across *Star Trek* contributes to multiple debates by taking account of the tensions between representation, the overall tenets of *Star Trek* and the commercial demands of television, as well as the interplay between product and fandom, including the voices of actor activists ("actorvists").

Several essays in the collection critique the ostensibly liberal humanist politics of *Star Trek*, illuminating entrenched attitudes and beliefs both in the franchise and American popular culture more widely. In “‘Into A Mirror Darkly’: Border Crossing and Imperial(ist) Feminism in *Star Trek: Discovery*,” Judith Rauscher gives an astute analysis of how *Star Trek* deploys and reinforces stereotyping and imperialism, with particular attention to the seduction of feminism by imperialist fantasy. Torsten Kathke gives a similarly insightful discussion of liberalism and its problems throughout *Star Trek* in “A *Star Trek* About Being *Star Trek*: History, Liberalism and *Discovery*’s Cold War Roots.” One of the strongest chapters in the collection is Henrik Schillinger and Arne Sonnichsen’s “The American Hello: Representations of U. S. Diplomacy in *Star Trek: Discovery*.” Their discussion of how *Discovery* confronts and complicates diplomacy in *Star Trek* is contextualized with a history of US diplomacy, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This complex analysis of contradictory elements leads to a critical and nuanced discussion of how *Discovery* utilizes notions of diplomacy to explore the values and ethics of the Federation, and by extension, the United States.

While much of the collection is strong, there are some shortcomings. Multiple typos throughout the book suggest rushed copy-editing, and the multiple riffs on “boldly going where no [INSERT NOUN] has gone before” get a bit tiresome. More specifically, several of the essays offer superficial and unconvincing arguments. Sarah Bohlau’s chapter, “‘Lorca, I’m Really Gonna Miss Killing You’: The Fictional Space Created by Time Loop Narratives,” offers some interesting links to PTSD within the context of *Discovery*’s time loop episode but is overall rather descriptive. Lisa Meinecke discusses *Discovery*’s device of a spore drive as a metaphor for connections and posthuman identity in “Veins and Muscles of the Universe: Posthumanism and Connectivity in *Star Trek: Discovery*,” and while Meinecke synthesizes an impressive array of theories, the chapter largely describes the show’s narrative and misses the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of posthumanism. Another missed opportunity is “To Boldly Discuss: Socio-Political Discourses in *Star Trek: Discovery* Fanfiction” by Kerstin-Anja Munderlein. Munderlein argues that the reflection of *Star Trek*’s socio-political content in fan fiction is inextricable from the show, but the analysis is excessively quantitative and appraising rather than critical. Perhaps most troubling is “The Conscience of the King Or: Is There in Truth No Sex and Violence?” in which John Andreas Fuchs performs a rather superficial analysis of sex and violence in *Discovery* and other *Star Trek* instalments. Various inconsistencies in Fuchs’ chapter suggest inadequate care, a problem further compounded by a lack of nuance and context as well as a condescending tone.

Due to the limited content of *Star Trek: Discovery*, there is some overlap in terms of what the authors discuss. The Mirror Universe comes up more than once, as Andrea Whitacre’s “Looking in the Mirror: The Negotiation of Franchise Identity in *Star Trek: Discovery*” analyzes *Discovery*’s reworking / reiterating of *Star Trek*’s tension between inclusion and exclusion. Whitacre delivers particular insight into how the Mirror Universe works as a place to work out alternatives to and problems with the ethos normally presented in *Star Trek*. In a similar vein, Ina Batzke’s chapter “From Series to Seriality: *Star Trek*’s Mirror Universe in the Post-Network Era” identifies the

importance of the Mirror Universe as a device of seriality which allows for the problematization of *Star Trek* in the post-network context.

Another recurring feature is a focus on particular characters, especially Michael Burnham (Sonequa Martin-Green), with various chapters discussing the identity politics of race, gender, and sexuality. Amy C. Chambers highlights that “*Star Trek* Discovers Women: Gender, Race, Science, and Michael Burnham,” in her discussion of the under-representation of black women in science fiction and scholarship, with an insightful focus on the figure of the woman scientist and the ideas of gendered science. Another perceptive commentary on *Discovery*’s protagonist is the “Interview with Dr. Diana A. Mafe on ‘Normalizing Black Women as Heroes,’” who identifies the representative strategies embodied by Burnham as well as how she is negotiated with other female characters on the show. Female roles within the structures of Starfleet and *Star Trek* are also the focus of Mareike Spychala’s “Not Your Daddy’s *Star Trek*: Exploring Female Characters in *Star Trek: Discovery*.” Spychala notes that *Discovery* goes further than previous iterations did with gender and gender relations through close attention to presentation and costume and persuasively argues for the show’s new forms of femininity, such as new roles for mothers.

Whit Frazier Peterson uses Afrofuturism to critically interrogate the philosophy of *Discovery* in “The Cotton-Gin Effect: An Afrofuturist Reading of *Star Trek: Discovery*.” While Peterson’s overall approach to technology as an intrinsic tool of oppression is interesting, the final argument that draws a parallel between the cotton-gin and *Discovery*’s spore drive is too rushed to be persuasive. A similar problem occurs with Si Sophie Pages Whybrew’s “‘I Never Met A Female Michael Before’: *Star Trek: Discovery* between Trans Potentiality and Cis Anxiety,” which identifies *Discovery*’s problematic framing of non-cisheteronormativity as alien and therefore Other, but offers a rather stretched argument over the character(s) of Ash Tyler/Voq (Shazad Latif) being a metaphor for trans-gender identity. More persuasively, Sabrina Mittermeier and Jennifer Volkmer also discuss Tyler/Voq in “‘We Choose Our Own Pain. Mine Helps Me Remember’: Gabriel Lorca, Ash Tyler, and the Question of Masculinity.” Mittermeier and Volkmer persuasively link *Discovery*’s construction of masculine identity to contemporary practices of masculinity as well as trauma studies and make excellent use of interviews to illustrate actors’ approaches to characters.

Although the perspectives and critical approaches vary, the reader may wish there was more material to talk about. The problem of limited material is most apparent in the section on Queering *Star Trek*. While it is valuable to highlight the dearth of queer representation in *Star Trek*, the three essays overlap in their discussions of the same few episodes. Season 3 of *Discovery* would have offered more material, and the writers and editors may have rejoiced or bemoaned the further forms of representation in that season. Perhaps ironically for a book entitled *Fighting for the Future*, it might have been improved by waiting for that future to arrive.

Despite these shortcomings, the essays of this collection are insightful and diverse and indicate a promising critical future for *Discovery* and *Star Trek* as a whole. It is likely to be of use to scholars interested in *Star Trek* and post-network television as well as various forms of narrative and

representation. As *Discovery* and indeed *Star Trek* as a whole continues to develop, the reader may find themselves hoping for a second edition of this volume that explores the subsequent seasons as well as further iterations of this ongoing and continually rich science fiction mythos.

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