



FULL SPEED AHEAD Cigar Aficionado - October 2006 Issue

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From Captain Kirk on "Star Trek" to Denny Crane on "Boston Legal" William Shatner has played the macho man with no regrets.

At 75, Bill Shatner's still got it. No one who grew up with Shatner portraying James Tiberius Kirk on "Star Trek" -- the television series or the movies -- the eponymous police hero of "TJ Hooker" or even the longtime host of "rescue 911" would have difficulty recognizing Bill Shatner today. Sure, there might be more of him to recognize than when he was in his 30s playing Kirk and running around in spandex suits -- assuming he wasn't naked from the waist up while kissing green-skinned alien women -- but Bill Shatner is still an attractive man.

Even when appearing in those goofy Priceline.com commercials where he can be found warbling songs, comparing women's high-heeled shoes or dressing up in a bellboy's outfit, there's a wink-wink, nudge-nudge flirtation with the viewer that says "Bill Shatner's still got it. He may be poking fun at himself but, deep down, he is still James Kirk. He is still a man's man, he is still a guy's guy."

He is also exhausted. In the two weeks prior to this interview, Shatner had shuttled between his home in Los Angeles and Cannes to promote his latest films, the animated features "The Wild" and "Over the Hedge, attended a charity event in Israel, worked on a film set in Canada, done an afternoon of voice work in New York and is now back in L.A. for a mix of work and personal business. Within 48 hours he'll be enroute to the Caribbean -- a vacation this time -- and several weeks later he'll be filming the third season of "Boston Legal."

The television series, David E Kelley's highly successful spin-off from his previous law drama "The Practice," features Shatner and James Spader ("sex, lies and videotape;" "Secretary") as the unlikely Laurel and Hardy-ish miscreant attorneys Denny Crane and Alan Shore in the high-priced "Boston Legal" law firm of Crane, Poole & Schmidt.

The show, crafted each week by Kelley and co-executive producer Bill D'Elia, features an impressive cast of co-stars including Candice Bergen, Rene Auberjonois, Mark Valley and Julie Bowen, and lets Shatner continue a character that started as a recurring spot on "The Practice" but took on a life of its own under the wickedly adept acting -- or impossibly prescient casting -- of Bill Shatner.

Denny Crane is a pompous, arrogant, yet brilliant attorney who routinely lies, hits on women and forgets things -- sometimes when it suits him, sometimes when it doesn't.

For the last two seasons, Denny Crane has contemplated the potential of having early-onset Alzheimer's (or early-stage mad cow disease), run in repeatedly on death and regularly offered up script lines that remind viewers that life is short, to stay focused on today and cram as much into the next 24 hours -- wine, women, song and pink Polarfleece flamingo costumes -- as you can.

To Denny Crane appearances can't be stressed enough, winning is everything and if you leave a little roadkill behind you on the Alpha Dog Highway, well, circle of life and all that.

And, really, Denny Crane might ask the jury, should these folks have even been allowed on the

highway to begin with?

What's intriguing is that it's the same message that Shatner conveyed as James T. Kirk, perhaps a tad more subtly, 40 years ago. To be so strongly identified with two different-yet-the-same character roles – one macho, career-driven and the guy who always gets the alien girl and the other macho, nearing the end of a career and still lusting after and chasing the girl – and to play them with such believability that viewers and critics have trouble differentiating between the man and the character, means that either Shatner is a genuinely brilliant actor, largely unappreciated or overlooked by critics, or an actor lucky enough to have been hired for roles so close to his own persona that the two become inexorably entwined.

Shatner himself has no problem acknowledging that there's a blurry line between Denny Crane, the character, and Bill Shatner, the man and actor. Or at least the industry perception of Bill Shatner, the man and actor.

"David Kelley is a genius. I mean that literally, [and] David himself has said that by watching me work, he writes for me, and I, by watching him write, am able to perform it," says Shatner. "So there's an unusual, if not unique, arrival of two forces that seem to combine, or a synthesis of two forces – a writer and an actor – that's just very unusual."

As "Boston Legal" fans know, the running gag within the show is Denny Crane's constant – at times absurd – use of his own name to not only introduce himself but to finish a sentence, make a point or simply fill in a conversational gap. Simply muttering "Denny Crane" is a one-stop, two-word response to anything that either intrigues or confuses him. It buys him time, infuriates others and, when whispered in his ear by co-star Candice Bergen, the very hearing of his own name does quite obvious things to a character who's been known to espouse the virtues of multiple partners and Viagra.

It's the ultimate on-screen example of not only an ego-driven, self-loving boor wanting to hear his own voice, but to hear his own name as well and Shatner offers up the "Denny Crane" name gag as a great example of how he and Kelley feed off each other.

"[David] will see something I do and write to that. An example of that is using my name, Denny Crane. I began to use [the utterance of the name 'Denny Crane' as an exclamation point, an everything, a flicker of a taste of what's in store. A probe for approval. Name the emotion and it's like a card, a 'how do you feel about this?' It's a litmus test. So [as] I began to do that, he began to write for it. It became something between us.

"I read," Shatner continues, "what he's written and see where he's pointing the character and try and invest the things he writes with a solidarity, an anchoring point, so that the buffoonery is serious and the serious parts are buffoonery...there is a continuity within my contribution to this thing."

Certainly two of the things Shatner contributed to "Boston Legal" are the additional Emmy and Golden Globe awards. Shatner took home the Emmy award last year for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series – he was nominated for the award again this year – and he also snagged the 2005 Golden Globe award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role.

The role of Denny Crane was good to him previously as well; in 2004, while still guest-starring in "The Practice," Shatner won the Emmy for Outstanding Actor in a Drama Series for the role he was able to keep making his own in "Boston Legal."

Shatner gives much of the award credit back to Kelley and D'Elia for the writing and direction, but also offers that he's having fun on the set, something he's rarely said about prior productions.

And, according to a few of his co-stars, he's right; the ensemble cast is having some fun. Mark Valley the actor who plays the uptight, square-jawed (square, period) attorney Brad Chase, and Rene Auberjonois, the veteran actor who plays the oft-exasperated senior partner Paul Lewiston, both describe Shatner as a "professional" on the set, with the younger Valley referring to Shatner (and Shatner's role as Captain Kirk) as "iconic."

Shatner claims that at least part of the fun he's experiencing on set is simply due to playing off co-star James Spader. While Kelley has written their characters as polar opposites in many ways – Spader's Alan Shore is a left-leaning Democrat, opposed to the death penalty who, often to his own dismay, takes on the problems of the little guy who can't always afford to pay, while Shatner's Crane is a money-motivated, beef-eating, gun-toting Republican who, when he can't catch a fish via normal means, shoots it – the two male characters share a common love of the law, beautiful women and closing the day out with a stiff drink and a fine cigar.

In what is now the traditional ending to each episode, Shore and Crane wander out to the spacious balcony off of Crane's office and, Scotch and cigar in hand, rehash the high points or lessons learned of the previous 60 minutes.

The wrapping up of each show this way, insists Shatner, just evolved naturally after the first episode aired. A lot of cigars have been lit since then, including a couple – or 10 – that Shatner would like to forget.

"We were doing a scene on the balcony," says Shatner, "and the reason we choose long cigars and light them so that it looks like they're freshly lit is because a scene on the balcony could take all day, which means that once you light a cigar, you're stuck with it all day long.

"The further away it is from your face, the less inhalation you're doing. Now," Shatner continues, "James is always telling me, 'Don't inhale. I'm not inhaling, don't inhale.' I, on the other hand, can't get past the fact that puffing on that cigar and letting the cigar exhale from your face, your nose, your mouth, your ears is what somebody who loves a good cigar like I do does. You fully taste it. It's hard to cheat for me, [although] it's easy to be talking with a lit cigar in your hand and drinking and looking like you're smoking...and not draw.

"So I took that to the furthest. I thought, 'With these long cigars, it looks like you just lit them up. Why don't I cut those cigars in half and light half the cigar so it looks like I've been smoking it for an hour.' So without thinking, early in the morning, we lit up one of those shorter cigars. I'm smoking one of the cigars that we cut in half, so now it's close to my mouth, nose and eyes. What I couldn't anticipate was [that] the scene went much, much longer than we expected. I counted 20 small cigars at the end of the scene. I had smoked 20 cigars over a period of several hours. OK? I haven't been sick to my stomach since I was six. That's the truth! I've avoided vomiting like the plague [and] I went home and vomited. You know what aversion therapy is? I had aversion therapy for cigars for about six months. It made me sick to even smell one. I'm now back. I'm back off the wagon, but I gave myself aversion therapy and I won't do that again."

Actually, Shatner says, he still smokes a cigar or two when he's off the set, but says he gets so many as gifts – and has so many problems trying to store them – that he pretty much smokes whatever's at hand.

"I prefer a full-bodied cigar to something subtle," muses Shatner. "The moisture factor in the cigar is critical for it to be a good smoke. If it's too dry, too hot, if it's too moist...it doesn't draw. So keeping the cigar in the exact right condition is critical; it's essential for the enjoyment of a cigar. So that can be a problem on the set."

Shatner discovered that it could also be a problem off the set, especially for someone like himself, who sometimes gets gifts of cigars. “One day several years ago, I took a pile of the cigars that I had, and I had various humidors – which you’ve got to keep filling up, and I keep thinking, ‘Is it distilled water? Why can’t I use water from the tap?’ – and I went to a local shop and I said, ‘I’d like to rent a humidor.’ And I put in thousands of dollars worth of cigars in their rented humidor. And then something happened in my life – it was a very traumatic moment – and I lost track, I lost the memory of having put the cigars there until a year and a half later when I recalled, ‘My God, that’s right.’”

Shatner went back to the store, asked for his cigars and was told that, because he had not frozen them before bringing them in, the cigars had become infested with bugs. As a result, the cigars had to be destroyed and the humidor fumigated. “And I thought,” says Shatner, “that’s the worst excuse I’ve ever heard for stealing my cigars and smoking them because I wasn’t around.’ I don’t know what the truth of the matter was...I’m still puzzled.”

While Shatner doesn’t elaborate on the traumatic event in his life that caused him to forget his cigars for a while – one assumes it may have been the 1999 alcohol- and valium-related drowning of his third wife, Narine, in the couple’s pool – it’s not hard to imagine Shatner losing track of at least a few things, if not his mind, while changing as many time zones and juggling as many work projects as the man seems wont to do.

In an A&E Biography segment that aired this year, “Boston Legal” co-star Candice Bergen lightheartedly described Shatner as “...an overactive child. He’s the Energizer Bunny.”

Bergen is referring, one assumes, to the septuagenarian Shatner’s schedule, both on-camera and off. When he’s not filming “Boston Legal,” Shatner can be found on a horse – he and his fourth wife, Elizabeth Anderson Martin, breed award-winning American Saddlebreds – on a motorcycle, on another film set, in a recording studio or en route to yet another time zone.

At the very start of the interview, Shatner admits, grudgingly, to being jet-lagged, a normal, human, physical impairment that most certainly differentiates him from a certain character who beamed from one planet to another without much more than a nod to an engineer or a solemnly uttered “Beam me up, Scotty.”

Shatner’s eyes are red, he’s terse and obviously anxious to use whatever little time he’s got at home in Los Angeles to visit one of his daughters and a couple of grandkids. Family, Shatner will tell you, is hugely important to him these days. He talks adoringly of his wife, Elizabeth, easily chats about the successes and happy lives of his three daughters, and comes as close to a genuine smile as we’ll experience during this interview when he’s discussing his five grandchildren.

The closeness to family hasn’t always been a major priority to the career-driven Shatner, and apparently, neither was closeness to co-workers. Born into a middle-class Jewish family in Montreal, Canada, William Shatner learned very early on that being onstage and acting was great, but that being onstage as the lead – the applause, the attention, the admiration – was even better. “I played Prince Charming a few times and well, Prince Charming...!” Shatner remembers, the implication being that it didn’t get any better than getting to play the hero, have the majority of the script lines and get the girl.

It’s a roll -- both on-camera and off – that Shatner has seemingly aspired to and fought for over his six-plus decades in show business. As a preteen and teenager in Canada, he appeared in theater productions and acted on-air for the Canadian Broadcasting Co. before being pressured by his father to go to business school and join the family apparel business. The young, camera-friendly Shatner earned the business degree but hated the idea of business unless it involved his love of acting and the negotiating of contracts, fees, royalties and the size and location of dressing rooms.

Shatner eventually joined the Stratford Shakespeare Festival under Sir Tyrone Guthrie and, following a role in a Guthrie production that took the troupe to New York, moved to the Big Apple with his first wife, actress Gloria Rand. Shatner managed to nab numerous television roles before, he says, a casting agent noticed that his cheekbones were similar enough to veteran actor Yul Brynner's to earn the still-unknown Shatner a role as the younger brother in the big-screen production of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

More movies were to follow, including *Judgment at Nuremberg* and *The Intruder*, as well as guest spots on some of the more popular television series of the time, such as "The Fugitive," "Big Valley," "The Twilight Zone" and "Route 66." More than a few of his guest appearances during the early- and mid-1960s revolved around fantasy/sci-fi themes or had him playing an idealistic young hero. Any one of these roles could have caught the eye of a Hollywood writer and director by the name of Gene Roddenberry.

CAPTAIN'S LOG

On September 8, 1966, William Shatner debuted in a television series that promised to take viewers where no man has gone before. Filmed at Desilu and picked up by NBC, "Star Trek" offered the audience "space, the final frontier" as the backdrop to a series of adventures that charged a radically, ethnically, mixed crew from the starship *Enterprise* with the task of roaming the universe in search of new worlds and new civilizations, oftentimes where they weren't wanted.

The show, which co-starred Leonard Nimoy as the half-human, half-Vulcan Mr. Spock and DeForest Kelley as Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy, was revolutionary on many fronts, including the fact that many of the issues it tackled were still quasi-taboo on television at the time. Issues surrounding war, democracy, women leaders and interracial—sometimes inter-species—relationships were all fair game to Roddenberry and the writers of "Star Trek," as was the show's core story line that the power behind a major country, world or "federation" had the right and obligation to explore and right perceived wrongs in other worlds and other cultures.

Other actors chosen to act on the "Star Trek" series only added to the sense of cultural unity and racial blindness that Roddenberry saw as the future; Nichelle Nichols, an African-American woman was hired to play Lieutenant Nyota Uhura, the ship's communication officer, while George Takei, an established Japanese film and television actor, who'd appeared on "I Spy," "Perry Mason" and "The Twilight Zone" came on board as the *Enterprise's* helmsman Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu.

Another Canadian actor, James Doohan, played the gruff engineer Montgomery "Scotty" Scott, complete with a credible Scottish accent, and Walter Koenig was hired to be the Russian navigator, Pavel Chekov. If, with the exception of the scripted bickering between Nimoy's Spock and Kelley's McCoy, there was harmony among the crew of the *Enterprise*, that didn't seem to extend to the cast beyond the cues of "rolling," "cut" and "take."

In takes too many to enumerate here, almost the entire cast of the original "Star Trek" series have recounted stories of petty arguments, verbal sparring matches and even threatened walkouts over issues involving ego, the number of lines in a particular script and "face time" on screen. With almost every regular cast member from "Star Trek" having written an autobiography, not to mention the thousands of media interviews conducted over the franchise's 40-year history, the one constant has been that while the crew of the *Enterprise* may have loved and respected Captain Kirk, the cast and crew of the television series disliked Bill Shatner intensely.

Shatner denied or ignored the rumors of unrest for more than two decades, but as the autobiographies proliferated and the cast and crew were repeatedly quoted in interviews following

every movie installment or Trekkie convention, he finally acknowledged that he was at least aware of the animosity.

Why it ever existed, he says, puzzles him immensely.

“I feel affronted. I feel that I’ve been assailed by some of them,” complained Shatner in one of his biography-style documentaries, “and, in defense, I’ve thought, ‘Well, I don’t like them,’ but that’s childish. I have no feeling of animosity. I never did feel or understand what I read is their distaste for me.”

Shatner recounts a particularly odd experience in which he was interviewing fellow cast mate Nichelle Nichols for an autobiography that he himself was working on. At the end of the interview, Nichols stopped him with “wait, don’t you want to hear how much we hated you?”

Shatner makes it clear that Nichols wasn’t pulling his chain, but insists that he’s still stymied by what prompted Nichols’ comment that day or her earlier reference to him as an “insensitive , hurtful egoist.” As recently as the A&E Biography filming, Shatner has continued to express perplexity over others’ takes on him.

The cable series, usually fairly deferential to celebrity subjects, referenced during the segment some of the accusations made against Shatner by those he’d worked with in the past, and quoted George Takei as saying that “Bill seemed totally immune to the sensitivities or efforts of those he worked with.” In the same segment, following some sensitive questions about Shatner’s abilities and sensibilities while on the show, even the usually very careful, very discreet Leonard Nimoy offered a modestly tongue-in-cheek response and a spontaneous outburst of laughter.

In spite of other cast mates’ and biographers’ statements to the contrary, Nimoy and Shatner have long purported to be friends offstage, as well as on, and Nimoy is almost always complimentary when discussing Shatner, the man, and Shatner, the actor.

“Bill’s energy was very good for my performance because I could then be the cool individual,” Nimoy, referring to his Spock character, says in the Biography segment. “Our chemistry was successful right from the start. Very competitive [and] sibling rivalry up to here,” he finishes, bringing his hands well over his head.

Nimoy simply smiles after hearing some additional comments from other cast mates, but finally breaks down for an uncharacteristically open laugh when one of the questions seems to imply scene stealing. “Bill Shatner hogging the stage?” Nimoy grins before breaking out into a belly laugh. “Never! Not the Bill Shatner that I know.” Shatner, for the most part, insists that things were great on the set and suggests that perhaps any conflict that’s come to light is more about perceptions and perceived wrongs than actual slights.

“I try to explain it this way. [Leonard Nimoy] and DeForest and I were the three people who were there every day. We worked our lengthy day [and] we were three buddies, buddies almost the whole time – with some exceptions—and they came in, the other member of the cast, on occasion...a day a week, maybe. Sometimes not. And when the show was over, everyone was happy, at least as far as I know.

“Then the conventions started, and the actors would go to the conventions and the audience would get up and applaud, and slowly, I think, the cast members began to consider themselves leads in the film and no longer wanted to take a backseat, [and] their perception of what the reality was had changed. I think of them with affection, and knowing them as long as [I] did adds to the mystique of affection. So I’m puzzled by their reaction.”

When pressed to explain whether what he feels could genuinely be called affection or not, he pauses. “Yes...removed. Affection for the image that one sees against the person inside.”

That Shatner played Captain Kirk with gusto and energy is one thing that can't be denied; his dramatic, highly unique way of emoting lines – always part of his acting style, but rarely as dramatic as on “Star Trek” – became infamous. The delivery was not unlike machine gun fire; abrupt starts and stops, long bursts punctuated with the occasional pause, and then another burst before stopping abruptly again.

The staccato delivery is so unique to Shatner that the style's been nicknamed “Shatnerian” (in contrast to Shatner being known to answer questions in oblique terms, often refusing to answer at all, which is referred to by the media as “Shatnerise”). After years of denying that he delivers his lines in a markedly distinct way, even Shatner now admits that, well, if he does it, he's not aware of it.

It's akin, he says, to the unique speaking styles of truly great actors such as Jimmy Stewart and Edward G. Robinson, even though, he suspects, they weren't aware of it.

The cancellation of “Star Trek” after only 78 episodes, Shatner has claimed, resulted from Paramount Pictures' desire to move the show to the big screen to capitalize on the cult-like popularity that the series had gained.

When National Public Radio's Bob Edwards suggested to Shatner in a 1994 interview that the very concept of “Star Trek” was, for some, a “...philosophy, a religion, something very deep and wonderful for them that fed some need in their lives.” Shatner instantly quipped back with, “It certainly fed a need in my life, didn't it? Put my kids through school.”

Shatner went on to explain that Paramount Pictures had cancelled the television series because the studio “...felt that making these films would be more profitable for them. I can't recall at any other time in entertainment history whereby a show is taken off the air at the height of its popularity and it's due to the fact that they wanted to make movies.”

As Spock would say, fascinating. Neither history nor Shatner's fellow actors remember it quite that way. In spite of it's five-year mission, “Star Trek,” at least the initial incarnation, was dry-docked after three seasons due to poor ratings. It gained viewers only after it went into syndication in the early 1970s and began appearing on an odd array of television channels during equally odd hours of the day and night. In fact, Paramount Pictures' first attempt at a “Star Trek” feature film, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* didn't come out until 1979, a decade after the original series had stopped being produced.

The impetus for the production of the movie was simple, remembers George Takei. Another George – producer/director George Lucas – and Twentieth Century Fox had had considerable success with another space-themed movie, *Star Wars*, and Paramount wanted to cash in on what it may have seen as a craze for which it had originally sown its seeds,

CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS

The decade between the television series and the first *Star Trek* movie wasn't what cast members had scripted for themselves, especially Shatner, who had become divorced from Gloria Rand toward the end of the series' three-year run. According to Shatner, Gloria wound up with the couple's house, the children and some healthy child-support payments, all at a time when the prospect of losing his series was a very real possibility with every Arbitron rating.

Shatner's father had died during the same period, and Shatner's grief, combined with the prospect of losing his family, encouraged him, perhaps, to explore new frontiers – female frontiers – at what has been suggested was warp factor two. Or seven.

Shatner, who for years has either ignored or denied rumors of a rather robust hobby of chasing women, responds to them now with a certain “Shatnerise.”

“Doing a series is backbreaking work. It's like coal mining, although you might get some arguments from the coal miners. Still, fourteen-, eighteen-hour days, day in, day out. All the mental and physical work that you're required to do is life-consuming.”

If the implication is that the divorce was inevitable based on his strenuous work schedule and his own demanding work ethic, he also apparently saw an obligation to meet others' needs with just as intrepid a work ethic and completion of duty.

“I was lost and lonely. I got divorced in the middle of the series and took affection,” Shatner pauses, “wherever I could find it. Not every week from every one of the beautiful girls that were on the show, but there was always someone around who, uh, had needs to be fulfilled and who needed to fulfill.”

While his explorations on the romance frontier might have been taking place at light speed, the wrapping up of the series meant that Shatner had not only career goals to fulfill, but also child-support payments; toward the end of the series. Shatner began to take on big-screen – of not big-budget – projects like *Incubus*, a sci-fi/fantasy film spoken entirely in the constructed language of Esperanto. *Big Bad Mama* and *Comanche Blanco*, a low-budget film that had Shatner playing twin, half-breed Comanche brothers living in the Old West.

Shatner took summer stock roles, driving cross-country to the theater productions and often living in the truck's camper to save money. There were guest appearances on television series like “Medical Center,” “Mission Impossible,” “Mannix” and “Marcus Welby, MD” before he was asked to voice Captain Kirk once more, this time for a Saturday morning cartoon production.

Shatner had married Marcy Lafferty, a production assistant, in 1973, and even as the actor was figuring out his next career move, a new generation of “Star Trek” fans, watching reruns of the original series on television, was helping to make that decision for him. He was asked to reprise Captain (soon to be Admiral) Kirk in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* in 1979, *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* in 1982, and *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* in 1984.

During this same period, he'd landed the lead role in the television series “TJ Hooker” and, while continuing to make four more *Star Trek* movies for Paramount – and ultimately seeing the now-retired James T Kirk killed off in the 1994 sequel *Star Trek Generations* – he became the host of the reality show “Rescue 911,” which aired for seven seasons.

By the late 1990s – almost 30 years after the introduction of James T Kirk – Shatner still couldn't seem to escape the reminder of the swaggering captain, the fans wouldn't let him. For decades, Trekkie conventions had allowed devotees to convene, swap dialogue (sometimes in Klingon) with other fans and purchase merchandise, meeting a demand that hadn't been there during the show's original airings.

The original cast for the television series – as well as the cast members of the many television spin-offs, including “Star Trek: The Next Generation.” “Star Trek: Deep Space Nine” and “Star Trek: Voyager” – were in big demand as speaking guests and, whether for the money or the glory, most of them went quite willingly. Shatner had his reservations and, although he attended events and collected substantial fees for autographs, speeches and participation in question-and-answer panels

for many years, his apparent disdain for the events and the fans became so well known that, years later, he actually did a now-famous skit on “Saturday Night Live,” in which he told a roomful of adoring Trekkies to “get a life!”

The phrase, and the sentiment behind it, caused immediate outrage from the fans and former cast mates, not to mention a movie studio that was investing tens of millions of dollars into each *Star Trek* movie installment.

Shatner issued a mea culpa, saying that he’d simply not understood the complexity of the fans’ devotion. He also claimed to be confused and perplexed by all the commotion around what was meant, in large part, to be a joke and, in 1999, put the experience down for (financially rewarding) posterity by penning *Get a Life*, yet another book in the Shatner library of more than 20 fiction and nonfiction titles that are either about or at least inspired by “Star Trek.”

Shatner, who has often commented about the rumored \$2 billion that’s been generated from the merchandising and selling of the “Star Trek” franchise, has himself done quite well from his association with Starfleet; besides the television show, the movies and the royalties that, at least in theory, continue to pay out, Shatner himself has produced more than a dozen films and documentaries related to either “Star Trek” or the exploration of science and space.” He has also seen his *Tek War* book series become a Sci-Fi Channel television series and introduced a monthly sci-fi/fantasy/horror DVD club that bears his name, if not exclusively his movies.

When questioned over the years about his take on the secret of the enduring popularity of “Star Trek,” Shatner has alternately claimed not to understand it at all, or not to understand it fully. Today, he chooses the neutral zone.

“Well, nobody knows. You have to accept the fact that nobody knows what the chemistry is...it’s like Coca-Cola; they aren’t going to tell you. Or they don’t know it themselves. It might have been the times. It might have been the characters. It might have been the stories. It might have been the philosophy. It might have been the actors.

“You know,” Shatner concludes, “one would tend to think that it was all of those things. But what it was, was that it caught the imagination of the American public, and NASA was at its height then. NASA says to this day, when they had the moon shots, that the ratings would go up on our show and our show helped them get a larger budget, and it was a whole thing that was happening at NASA and [with] the romance of space.”

The romantics of space exploration, however, seems to have its limits when it comes down to Shatner’s personal interest. Contrary to media reports that Shatner signed on with Virgin Galactic – British entrepreneur Richard Branson’s space travel company – to be one of its first adventure tourists into space at a ticket price of \$250,000, Shatner says it’s not only untrue, it all comes down to money and that vomit thing again.

“Virgin used me as a publicity thing [and] without my permission, And they came to me later and said, ‘We’ll let you go on free.’ And I said, ‘You’ve got the wrong idea, you’ve got to pay *me* to go!’ Well, my interest in the theory of space and the theme of man’s march into the unknown and the necessity of her grand goals...that’s all there, but to vomit in space is not my, you know, [idea of a good time]. And the fiery crash with the vomit hovering over you?” asks Shatner. “No. So I need guarantees like, ‘You will definitely come back. You’re going up, but you’ll definitely come back down.’ I’m not saying I don’t want to go – I do want to go, but I’m not going to pay \$250,000 to go.”

That doesn’t mean, however, that Shatner wouldn’t mind having a visitor from space come visit him instead. *Mi Planeta, su planeta*. Again.

According to Dennis William Hauck, an author and lecturer on the paranormal, Shatner has more than boldly gone where no man – or few men – has gone before; he got them to come to him.

According to Hauck, who penned the unauthorized biography *Captain Quirk* following a documentary project on which he consulted with Shatner entitled *Mysteries of the Gods*, Shatner witnessed a UFO while motorcycling with friend in the Mojave Desert in California.

It was 1967, during the filming years of “Star Trek,” and Shatner and four friends had decided to take their bikes out for a spin near Edwards Air Force Base. Shatner became separated from his friends during a spill from the bike and has since recounted a story that had both him and his Suzuki Titan 500 experiencing functional changes following his sighting. There was even some modest speculation as to whether Shatner had had psychic communication with the extraterrestrials or even been abducted.

In fact, says Hauck, Shatner’s infamous spoken-word album entitled, *The Transformed Man* – dubbed the “Transformed Ham” by less than enthusiastic music critics and which became a staple on the “Dr. Demento Show” – was recorded in direct response to his experience in the desert. Hauck elaborates on how each song (or song rendering) on the album had specific meaning as to how Shatner remembered the encounter, and specifically points to “the magic swirling ship” lyrics of “Mr. Tambourine Man” and some of the potentially otherworldly lyrics of “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” as being messages back to his visitors that he had, in fact, paid attention to the experience.

The self-penned lyrics of Shatner’s latest musical offering, *Has Been*, are a bit less oblique and perhaps a bit more revealing than the ones he borrowed for *Transformed Man*. Although still mocked a bit by critics, the effort wasn’t savaged nearly as badly as his previous attempts at musical expression. Shatner’s lyrics – which take on everything from politics to the grief he experienced at his third wife’s sudden death – are accompanied by the music and background vocals of everyone from Joe Jackson to Brad Paisley.

While a couple of the cuts on *Has Been* deal with the inevitability of death and the resulting loneliness – a topic that has been at the top of Bill Shatner’s “to muse, ponder and pontificate on” list for decades – the title track lays down more than a snappy little beat; it lays down Shatner’s take on himself, his future and his detractors.

In the final refrain of “Has Been,” Shatner offers up “What are you afraid of?/Failure?/So am I/Has Been implies failure/Not so/Has Been is history/Has Been was/Has Been might again.”

Aye, Aye, Captain.