

Impressions From a Newbie Conventioneer
Creation Entertainment's Official Star Trek Convention
Las Vegas, Nevada August 8-11, 2013

by Rex Ungericht, www.parodyman.com

At the very end of it all, my wife touched George Takei.

But it all started back in the 1970's, when I first had the thought that it would be fun to attend a Star Trek convention. That thought remained with me through the years, but I always seemed to have other, more immediate uses for my time and money.

Then, in 1999, DeForest Kelley (McCoy on the original series) passed away.

In 2005, James Doohan (Scotty on the original series) passed away.

In 2011, Leonard Nimoy (Spock on the original series) said that he was done attending Star Trek conventions.

And after each of those events, attending a Star Trek convention moved higher on my priority list. So in 2013, I finally signed up for a Star Trek convention, along with my wife and daughter.

Why the Vegas Convention?

There are still several Star Trek / Science Fiction conventions happening around the world each year. After reading various blogs and message boards, I came away with the general impression that the smaller conventions are more informal and attendees have a better chance at spending a few minutes with their favorite Star Trek cast and crew members, but there are fewer cast and crew members to meet. The larger conventions have many more cast and crew members, but because of the size, attendees are rushed through the autograph and photo lines and conversations are limited.

Although I would love to chat with certain Star Trek folk, I was thinking that this would likely be my one and only Star Trek convention -- and therefore I went with the one that would let me see the largest number of cast & crew members. I was also looking for a location that didn't require a long flight. Dallas to Vegas takes a couple of hours or so. With the two-hour time change, the flight out didn't take any time at all, but the flight back took over four hours :-).

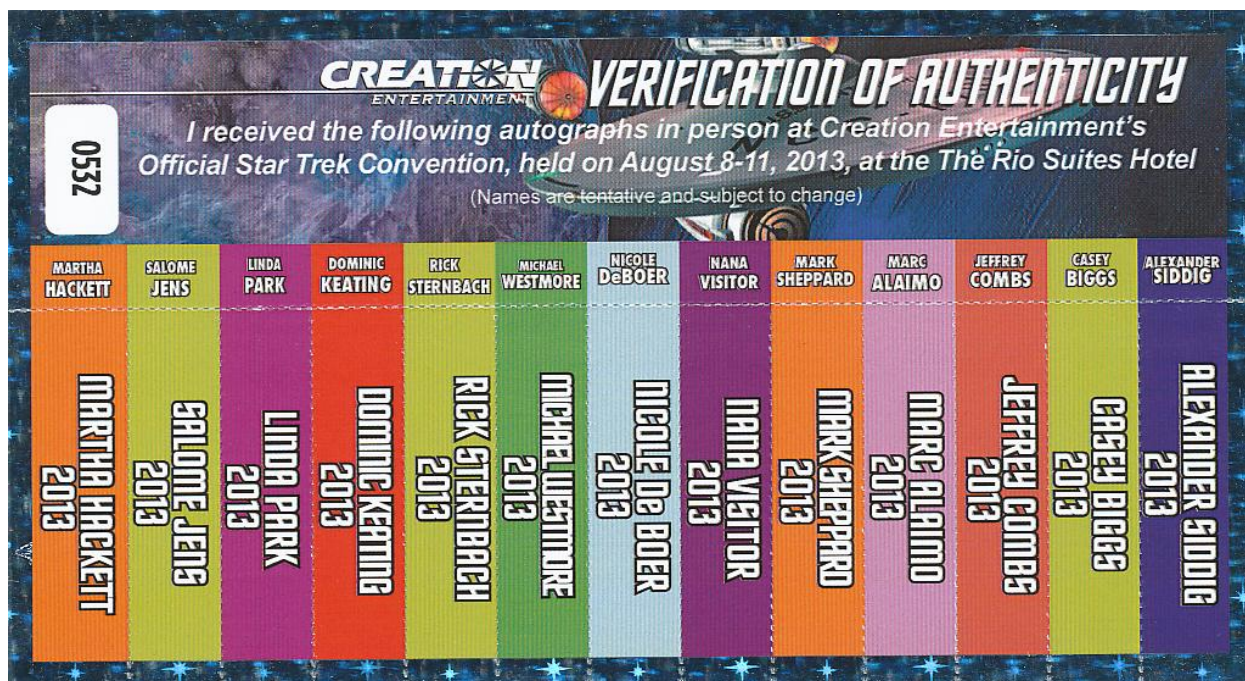
Convention Details

The following information applies only to the convention I attended. However, at least some of the following details probably apply to all of the large SF/Fantasy conventions conducted by Creation Entertainment, and possibly conventions by other groups.

Convention tickets are sold in various "packages" and individually. The tickets for the most-expensive package go on sale first, then tickets for the second-most-expensive package, and so on, with general admission single-day tickets made available last.

The big advantage of buying package tickets, to me, is for the reserved seating in the main auditorium. Generally, Gold package purchasers sit in the front section, Captain's Chair package purchasers sit in the second section, and Preferred/Silver package purchasers sit in the third section. (The seats at the edges don't necessarily follow this rule, but the center sections do.)

Gold package members also have a bunch of autograph tickets included in their package.



Gold and Captain's Chair package members get a dinner party, a dessert party, a card that gets you free and discounted merchandise in the vendors hall, and a few other goodies like a coin that commemorates the convention.





**YOUR TREK-TREAT GIFTS:
ENJOY AND THANKS FOR
COMING!**

**Gary and Adam
and all your friends at Creation**

- () Star Trek autographed hand signed photo, visit the photo tables far left wall after 3 pm Friday or Saturday
- () TWO Sci-Fi Celebrity autographed hand signed photos (random choice) at the photo tables far left wall Saturday and Sunday after 1 pm
- () \$5 off a Star Trek T-shirt (our choice as displayed at tee shirt booth as you enter vendors room)
- () 10% off one purchase of an item at any auction in the Secondary Theatre (not retroactive, this must be presented when purchase is made)
- () \$5 off additional Gold Collector's Coin 2013 which will be on sale Sunday at the tee shirt booth as you enter the vendors room (as long as they last)
- () 10 % off (one time use) at The Fine Arts Booth (tables in front wall middle as you enter vendors room)
- () Gift at Richard Arnold's Star Trek Collector Cards Table (T32-T33: FRONT RIGHT HAND WALL)
- () Gift at Jacobs/Brown Media Table (T8: BACK LEFT HAND CORNER)
- () Gift at Springtime Creations table (T18-19 BACK WALL, LEFT HAND CORNER)
- () Gift at TRIBBLES Table (T37-38 REAR LEFT HAND SIDE BOX OF TABLES, FACING BACK WALL)
- () Gift at Satellite Comics Table (T67-69 SECOND TO LAST BOX OF TABLES ON LEFT SIDE, FACING ENTRANCE)
- () Gift at Heroes in Action Table (T131-133, RIGHT HAND SIDE, SECOND TO LAST BOX OF TABLES, FACING THE ENTRANCE)



For the 2013 convention, Gold tickets were \$729 each, Captain's Chair tickets were \$499 each, Preferred/Silver tickets were \$329 each, General Admission tickets for the entire convention were \$149 each, Preferred Admission single day tickets (which got you a reserved seat in the main auditorium) were \$60 for Thursday, \$60 for Friday, \$80 for Saturday, and \$80 for Sunday. General Admission single day tickets were \$35 for Thursday, \$35 for Friday, \$40 for Saturday, and \$40 for Sunday.

In addition to the convention tickets, you could buy autograph tickets. Some folks were offering free autographs, but you had to pay for autographs from many of the celebrities -- anywhere from \$20 to \$100. (This is something I've never understood. Why in the world would I pay anyone for their signature? I do understand that getting a signed photograph or whatever from a favorite celebrity is valuable to many people, and that there is a thriving market for autographs. Still, it boggles my mind.)

You could also buy "photo op" tickets, with individual celebrities and groups. These ranged anywhere from \$40 to \$240. I've read that these sessions are basically "step up, click, thank you move along", which is pretty much a necessity at huge conventions with long lines of folks. If you want the opportunity to schmooze with your favorite celebrities, you'll likely have a better chance at smaller conventions.

And then there were "meet & greet" sessions with various celebrities, and the one type of event I considered spending extra cash for (but didn't): celebrity lunches with multiple actors who made the rounds and chatted at each table.

Anyway, if you wanted to get a bunch of autographs/photos/face time, it would cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars. I can see where the travel and convention tickets would be just a small part of what some folks spend.

When you check in, you get a colored wristband that presumably identifies which type of package/ticket you purchased.



There are folks at the entrances to all the convention rooms checking to make sure you have a wristband.

Some folks (the package purchasers maybe?) also get a badge to wear, although it seems to me that wearing the badge is optional, since it's the wristband that gets you admittance.



There are sessions going on pretty much all day in various rooms. This can cause scheduling conflicts when things you want to see are happening at the same time in different rooms. And in addition, there are scheduled times for autographs and photo ops, so those can conflict with other things. You won't be able to see it all and do it all, you're going to have to make choices.

The Hotel

The convention was held in the Rio Suites hotel, just off the strip.



One small wing of the hotel

For those not familiar with Vegas, the "strip" is a group of resorts that line Las Vegas Boulevard South, with the southern end (Mandalay Bay) next to the airport and the northern end (The Sahara) at Sahara Boulevard. The center of the strip, and ground zero for gambling in the Milky Way Galaxy, is the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Flamingo Road. The Rio is a couple of blocks west of this intersection, on Flamingo Road on the west side of Interstate 15.

The cab ride from the airport to the hotel was less than \$20.

There are a couple of free shuttles that take you from the Rio to the strip and back. If I remember correctly, one shuttle goes to Harrah's, while the other goes to Bally's/Paris (the two are connected). We took the shuttle over to Bally's on Friday evening and walked up and down the strip, eating at Wolfgang Puck's and seeing the fountains outside the Bellagio, the volcano outside the Mirage, and the siren/pirate show outside Treasure Island. We also saw a trio of street dancers who put on quite a series of moves -- I swear one of those guys must be quadruple-jointed.

There are two hotels on the Rio property. We stayed in the slightly curved one at the end of the complex. The other is a three-pronged hotel built into the complex.

Our room was nice but not spectacular. There were a few carpet stains and a couple of cracks in the wall where someone had slammed the door open, but no big issues. It was just a nice clean hotel room. It came with an LED TV, a small refrigerator, a safe, a full-size ironing board and iron, and the typical toiletries. There was a Keurig coffee maker, but no free coffee -- the "K-cups" (for those of you familiar with Keurig coffee makers) were 3 for \$8 from the mini bar. If I ever go back, I'm taking my own K-cups.



The view from our room

There are several restaurants on the property, including your basic bar & grill, a buffet, and various specialty restaurants (Italian / seafood / Indian / Chinese / Vietnamese). There's even a Burger King on-site for a quick sandwich.

You can think of the hotel as two separate but connected parts: the hotel/shop/restaurant/casino part, and the convention center part.

There is a long hallway that connects the two. Along the hallway is the Sao Paulo Cafe (breakfast & lunch), a Starbucks, and the Penn & Teller Theatre. Once you get past those, you turn a corner and walk down to the convention center.

The Convention Center

The convention takes place in several rooms: the main theatre, a secondary theatre, a vendors hall, and a few smaller rooms.

The main theatre is huge. And the floor does not slope, so all the seats are on the same level. This (to me) makes a seat up toward the front an imperative; the farther back you are, the more difficult it can be to see the folks on stage, and you might end up watching the monitors instead of the stage.



Just a part of the main theatre

The secondary theatre is not as large, although it can still hold over a thousand folks. There is no reserved seating in the secondary theatre, but we never had any problems finding good seats.

The vendors hall had several rows packed with vendors selling not only Star Trek merchandise, but a variety of other science fiction and related stuff. Many of the autograph sessions took place in the vendors hall. At this convention, the vendors hall also showcased a re-creation of the Enterprise Bridge (The Enterprise-D, if I remember correctly). One day when I was walking into the vendors hall, I heard someone announcing "I hear Robert Picardo is signing autographs now." I looked over and saw that it was Robert Picardo.

Taking Pictures

Although audio/video recording is not allowed for the most part, you can take pictures. However, I discovered that it can be difficult to do so in the theatres.

Did I mention the theatres were huge? Especially the main one. And the lighting, although perfectly adequate for seeing everything going on, is not bright enough for many cameras (especially ones like the small snapshot camera I took - a [Canon PowerShot SX110 IS](#)).

So, for me, zooming in to the stage required either more lighting or a longer exposure. My little flash couldn't light up the stage from back where I was sitting, and a longer exposure resulted in blurry photos. (For some reason, no one seemed interested in standing perfectly still for a second while I was taking a picture.)



So, I have little in the way of a visual record of the convention. (I plan on making a montage or a scrapbook of the event, so I'll be scouring the Internet for photos. If you have any, please consider sharing.)

I guess the point here is to bring a camera that can take 1/60th of a second or faster exposures in lower light while zoomed. Which is something I don't currently have.

Ok, Enough of the Setting. Let's Get to the Convention Events!

I don't know how long Creation Entertainment leaves up past convention schedules, but at the time of this writing you can see the entire schedule at http://www.creationent.com/cal/st_lasvegas.html#sch.

Many of the sessions, especially in the main theatre, are primarily Q&A sessions. One or more cast & crew take the stage, say a few words, then start answering questions from folks who line up at the microphones on either side of the stage.

Anyway, as I mentioned previously, it's impossible to see everything. So here's the report for the sessions I attended, although with my poor memory I can't do them justice. But overall, they were interesting, informative, entertaining, lol funny, or any combination of those.

Thursday, 11am: A Look at Matt Jefferies, Classic Star Trek's Art Director. This session was conducted by Richard Jefferies, brother of the late Matt. Richard presented a series of photos from Matt's life, showing how Matt's experience in the military during WWII provided the foundation for creating images of space ships and other futuristic items. You can see an interview with Richard Jefferies at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg9oUxkAqvo>.

Thursday, 2:15pm: Joanna Cassidy, Chris Sarandon, and Sally Kellerman. For those of you who know your Star Trek characters, these actors played T'Pol, Martus Mazur, and Elizabeth Dehner. Joanna got some giggles from the audience when she misspoke and said "I tried to be like Dr. Spock." Martus spoke about his time working on *The Princess Bride*. Apparently, the Miracle Max scene was ad-libbed by Billy Crystal, and one actor cracked a rib trying not to laugh. Elizabeth said what many other actors have said, that it was a joy to work with Robert Altman (which she did on M*A*S*H).

Thursday, 2:55pm: Connor Trinneer and Anthony Montgomery, aka Trip Tucker and Travis Mayweather. Before they went into Q&A mode, they had the audience participate in the making of a Harlem Shake video, which you can see a little bit of at <http://instagram.com/p/cxMHeGPgtT/>. I'm still waiting for the complete edited version that we were promised. Yes, I'm looking at you Anthony.

UPDATE! Thank you Anthony. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQAvSwkBP5M>

Thursday, 5:00pm: Alexander Siddig, aka Dr. Julian Bashir. His real name is Siddig El Tahir El Fadil El Siddig Abderrahman Mohammed Ahmed Abdel Karim El Mahdi. Call him Sid. Sid is one of several actors who impressed me with charm, wit, and intelligence. He and I have a lot in common :-). If you watched Deep Space Nine, you'll know his character had a close relationship with Miles O'Brien (played by Colm Meaney). After the first two questioners asked about this relationship, Siddig turned to the next one and asked mock-frustrated "All right, what do YOU want to know about Colm?"

Thursday, 6:15pm: Nichelle Nichols. The Grand Dame of Star Trek, Nichelle talked about growing up as a performer, and working with some of the great band leaders of the time. When asked about William Shatner as a director, she answered that he turned out to be an excellent director, which surprised them all.

Thursday, 8:30pm: Celebration Party. This was held in the Voodoo Lounge at the top of the hotel. There are two levels to the lounge, and the upper level has a small stage area where three Star Trek actors sang one-at-a-time during the course of the evening. My wife, daughter, and I were in the lower level and so heard but did not see the performances. The buffet dinner was good, with salad, several entrees, and later a dessert station. I found it interesting that the schedule had the dinner starting at 8:30, but when we arrived at a couple minutes past, the place was already packed. So I guess if you go to one of these dinners, be sure to get in line early.

Friday, 10:10am: John de Lancie. I was disappointed that John did not start out his session with "It's hard to sit through Q&A when you're omnipotent." :-) John came to the convention after spending four months sailing the ocean with three friends. He was (and maybe still is) involved with music education, appearing with orchestras and explaining the history and context of the music. One of the most interesting observations he made (and I intend to do) is that if you really want to see an actor's style, how he or she works with movement and facial expressions and the like to make a character come alive, just turn off the sound.

Friday, 11:00am: Star Trek Voyager. Ethan Phillips (aka Neelix), Tim Russ (aka Tuvok), Robert Picardo (aka the holographic doctor), and Garrett Wang (aka Harry Kim) all on stage. With around half an hour and four people on stage, that's 7.5 minutes each if the talk is distributed equally. But then subtract the time people are asking questions, and you don't get to hear a lot from each actor. But they were funny and entertaining with the time they had. Picardo said that one thing you never do in auditions is ad-lib. But then he said that his ad-libbing in his Star Trek audition got him the job. They all remembered an actor who played an alien in a brown costume -- "he looked like a turd. We called him the Captain's log."

Friday, 11:45am: Mars. Professor David Williams from Arizona State University gave an overview on what we've done and where we're going with Mars exploration, including his work on the Mars Express High-Resolution Stereo Camera Team. He showed the step-by-step approach to Mars, from flybys to orbiters to landers to rovers and maybe a manned mission someday. And, I got a poster! :-)

Friday, 1:15pm: Catherine Hicks. Aka Gillian in Star Trek IV, Catherine told the story of how the movie was -- if I remember correctly - the second production directed by Leonard Nimoy, and the one that put Nimoy on the map as a top director. She also spoke of using her mime training to act like she had just walked into a cloaked Klingon cruiser.

Friday, 2:10pm: Makeup Session with Suzie Plakson. Makeup artist John Paladin joined Suzie on stage and applied her Klingon prosthesis. Once she had the makeup on, the spirit of K'Ehleyr possessed her and told us...something I'm sworn not to reveal.



Suzie Plakson becomes K'Ehleyr

Friday, 2:55 pm: Dominic Keating followed by Linda Park. Dominic (aka Malcolm Reed) sang an alternate version of the Enterprise theme, which you can see and hear (from a previous convention) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pfe64OXDLB0>. Linda told us how she would have liked for the character of Hoshi Sato to have more interpersonal relationships as the show progressed.

Friday, 4:40pm: Walter Koenig. For those who follow the former Lieutenant Chekov, you know that his assessment of Star Trek and his role has run hot and cold over the years. At this point in his life, he shared that the older he gets, the more he appreciates Star Trek.

Saturday, 11:10am: Terry Farrell. What vivaciousness. I wonder if she's like that off stage. Terry surprised us all by first saying that she would make a costume and show up at next year's convention for the costume party, and then getting a costume and showing up this year. Also, it turns out she's a gardener. I'd love to check out her tomatoes (and that's not a metaphor for anything, you pervs). Terry said she saw Ira Behr (producer) at the convention, and they had a discussion in which she found out that the issue(s) that caused her departure from Deep Space Nine could have been resolved. "Rick Berman (director) is the bad guy in this" she said.

Saturday, 11:55am: Gates McFadden and LeVar Burton. Gates spent some time speaking about her theatre company, and said she was auctioning off some of her Star Trek memorabilia in the auction sessions to help support the company. She brought her communicator badge to show us, and LeVar grabbed it and started auctioning it off right then and there. There were gasps when the bidding hit \$1000, and more gasps at \$2000. A lady in the audience got it (and a personal thank you from Gates) for \$2100. While they were on stage, Jonathan Frakes came out to great applause and spoke for a minute, telling us that he needed to speak now since he likely wouldn't get a chance to say anything when he got out on stage for the next session with Marina Sirtis. Shortly after Frakes made his cameo, Brent Spiner slowly walked across the back of the stage without saying anything to much laughter.

Saturday, 12:35pm: Jonathan Frakes, Brent Spiner, and Marina Sirtis. A fan told Marina how the character of Deanna Troi inspired her and others to become counselors. Marina replied along the lines of "That's great, but just remember I'm an actress. I say my lines and hit my marks." All three were asked what they thought were the best scenes in The Next Generation, and Brent answered "the ones with Data, because I'm in them". Jonathan was asked if the character of Thomas Riker was initially created to replace Will Riker. He didn't think that was the case.

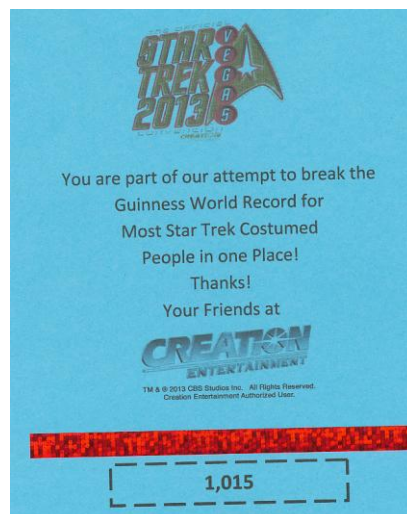
Saturday: 2:15pm: William Shatner and Kate Mulgrew. The Shat opened with some comments about how his success (which being Captain Kirk is a big part of) has opened many doors for him to work with artisans on a wide variety of projects, and he described some of them, like working with folks on a statue and on a watch. He also said something along the lines of "When you reach a certain age, your memory of the past begins to fade. In my case, my memory of the present is also fading." Kate spoke of how much she enjoyed playing Red on *Orange Is The New Black*. "Janeway was a great character but she was better than most, while Red is just trying to survive."

Saturday, 5:40 to 7:20pm: Costume Record Attempt. Some time ago (maybe last year?), the Las Vegas Star Trek Convention set a Guinness World Record for the most people in Star Trek costumes with 1,040. Then, in October, the London Convention topped that with 1,063. Could the 2013 Las Vegas Convention top that? My wife, my daughter, and I were numbers 1,015, 1,016, and 1,017.



I'm the one behind the camera

We were three of the total of...1,085. Yes, I now am part of a Guinness World Record. And looking around the room, I think I was the only one in a costume from the JJ Abrams reboot movies. (Which the greeter recognized immediately, saying "JJ Star Trek costume. Very nice.") BTW, my costume was made by Ealy productions. Once I get her some photos, she might post them on her website so you can see it. http://www.pbase.com/gelfling33/ealy_productions Her specialty is ren faire costumes.



Saturday, 7:30pm: Costume Contest. Many of the folks in the best costumes entered into the costume contest. I think there were around 40 finalists. If you ever want to be in the contest, you need to know that the judges give a lot of credit to folks who make their own costumes, and even more credit to folks who make their own masks (if one is needed). If you can explain how you made your costume, and if your costume looks like the corresponding costume in the TV show or movie, you have a good chance in the contest.



Costume contest

Sunday, 9:10am: Jeri Ryan. What a sweetheart. One of the questioners asked "Last year at the convention you spoke about your husband. Are you still married?" She replied, "Yes, I'm still married." To which the questioner hung his head, said "I'll see you next year" and walked off. She spent some time talking about how watching her daughter watching Star Trek is turning her into a huge geek.

Sunday, 10:10am: George Takei. George spent several minutes talking about the need to pull the Olympics from Russia because of the new law criminalizing the LGBT community in Russia. He encouraged those who supported this effort to sign the [petition at change.org](https://www.change.org/p/stop-the-olympics-in-russia). He also spoke of the feud between William Shatner and Carrie Fischer and his role in attempting to resolve the animosity. And he spoke of how the Howard Stern show turned a simple "oh, my" spoken on the show into his catchphrase.

Sunday, 11:30am: Karl Urban. He strode out on stage, turned to the audience, and opened with "Are you out of your Vulcan minds?" What I most remember about Karl was his exposition on working to capture the essence of McCoy without becoming a caricature of McCoy.

Sunday, 12:45am: Kate Mulgrew and Robert Beltran. Many folks used this session to compliment Kate for her role as Galina 'Red' Reznikov in *Orange Is The New Black*. Kate took Robert to task for his get-togethers with the male cast members of *Voyager*. "Why don't you invite the women?" she asked. Robert replied "Because none of you slept with us." They went to questions, and first in line was...Garrett Wang (aka Ensign Harry Kim). "Why was I never promoted?" he asked Mulgrew/Janeway.

Sunday, 2:15pm: Deep Space Nine Panel One. Avery Brooks (aka Captain Benjamin Sisko), Terry Farrell (aka Jadzia Dax), Cirroc Lofton (aka Jake Sisko), Nana Visitor (aka Kira Nerys), Armin Shimerman (aka Quark), Michael Dorn (aka Worf), James Darren (aka Vic Fontaine), Rene Auberjonois (aka Odo), and Nicole de Boer (aka Ezri Dax). Terry Farrell told the story of how she once called Majel Barrett Rodenberry "Mrs. Roddenberry", and was responded to brusquely by Majel. But then Majel felt bad about it and gave Terry a Faberge egg. Armin stated that the Ferengi Quark was the most human character on the show. In a discussion about makeup, they agreed that Colm Meany just hated the Klingon makeup he had to wear on one episode, and complained about it a lot.

Sunday, 3:35pm: Deep Space Nine Panel Two. Aron Eisenberg (aka Nog), Max Grodenchik (aka Rom), Casey Biggs (aka Damar), Marc Alaimo (aka Gul Dukat), Jeffrey Combs (aka Weyoun), Chase Masterson (aka Leeta), and Andrew Robinson (aka Garak). Aron said that when he first met Cirroc (Aron's and Cirroc's characters were the same age and good friends on the show), he was in makeup and Cirroc thought they were the same age in real life. Cirroc was 14 and opened up to Aron like he was also 14, and was surprised when he found out Aron was 24. Max Grodenchik said that Leeta's love interest turned to his character Rom from Dr. Bashir so that they could "keep Bashir single for the female viewers". But the moment no one there will forget is when a nervous and crying young lady spoke of how DS9 had saved her from suicide. Both Jeffrey Combs and Chase Masterson spoke directly to her, and we all hope she is finding her way back to happiness.

Sunday, 9:15pm: The Star Trek Rat Pack. What a great way to close out the convention. As a song parodist myself, I was really interested in hearing the tunes written by Max Grodenchik (aka Rom). Fun stuff, with the different actors singing about their characters. Jeffrey Combs (aka Weyoun et al) and Casey Biggs (aka Damar) both played guitar at times, and Casey displayed some not inconsiderable vocal skills. The group was rounded out with Vaughn Armstrong (aka Admiral Maxwell Forrest et al), Armin Shimerman (aka Quark), and keyboard accompaniment by Bill Burchell (composer of music for films & TV, among other things). The only issue I had with the show is that it was way too short. (And guys, if you need any new material, let me know.) You can see a picture of them in action at <https://twitter.com/LaurieLeeV/status/366778551615238144/photo/1>.

And Then, It Was Time To Leave

Monday morning our group (3 of us there for the convention, another 3 there for Vegas) stepped out of the hotel and asked for a cab. There wasn't one in the cab queue large enough for 6, so they called one. While we waited, other folks would line up behind us, and the staff would call them to cabs that were waiting. They called one fella , but he wasn't paying attention, so my wife tapped him and told him his cab was ready. It was George Takei.