



ARTS



Writer gets caught in next generation

by Salman A. Nensi

Star Trek: The Next Generation
—“Contamination”
by John Vornholt

A mass murderer is loose on the *Enterprise*

While investigating the accidental death of one of the Federation's greatest scientists, Dr. Lynn Costa, who is serving aboard the *Enterprise*, Lt. Worf and Counsellor Troi begin to come to the awful conclusion that she was murdered.

Worf and Troi try to out think an assassin who finds that one murder is not enough to cover his tracks. Soon Worf and Troi are in a race to solve the mystery before the murderer can strike again.

John Vornholt, author of *ST:TNG Masks* and now *Contamination*, has been a *Star Trek* fan since the show first aired in the late '60s. He is also a fan of the new show which he finds very helpful in character development.

Even though Vornholt has now written two *Star Trek* books, he never thought of writing for *Star Trek* until his agent suggested it and it sounded like fun.

Before he wrote his first novel, *Masks*, Vornholt had been writing non-fiction, mostly about computers and other technical writing.

Although he had never written a full length fiction novel, he was not a stranger to the art of writing fiction having written animated cartoons, motion

picture scripts, plays and even song lyrics.

Vornholt felt that writing a *Star Trek* novel as his first fiction book had many added benefits.

“Normally if I had a first novel, with just my name on it, I would get limited exposure,” Vornholt said. “With *Star Trek*, one hooks up with a lot of readers who will, hopefully, follow when I write other kinds of books.”

The title of his latest book comes from Dr. Lynn Costa's area of study. She and her husband study micro contaminants and ways of keeping them under control. Dr. Costa is murdered in one of the special laboratories when a leak occurs and the lab is contaminated.

The inspiration for the book came from a magazine called *Micro Contamination*, a trade journal for ultra clean manufacturing.

“I found that really fascinating,” Vornholt said. “I thought to myself, that there would be an ultra clean lab like those in the magazine on the *Enterprise*.”

Vornholt warns that inspiration is not as simple as it sounds.

“I don't think you can sit down and say to yourself, ‘today I'm going to come up with a really good idea for a book. You have to just sort of leave your antenna open. You never know when you're going to come up with a good idea.’”

Some writers find naming their characters and places difficult, but for John, it's easy. He has a system.



If not for the murder mystery that takes place on board in the micro contamination labs, our heroes in the tight shirts would be *Star Trekking* into the next dimension a long time ago. So Klingons circling Euranus beware, Captain Jean-Luc Picard and his crew are coming to ensure that justice is served.

“When I need a name, I look around. Whatever happens to be lying around with names on it, I use. Sometimes I'll modify the names after I get to know the characters better.”

Vornholt also uses friends' names, modified, of course.

Having found the transition from non-fiction to fiction relatively painless, Vornholt now feels comfortable with writing both.

“I can't imagine giving one up for the other,” Vornholt said. “I like writing lots of different kinds of things. Having now written a novel, I think I've written every kind of writing there is.”

Vornholt dropped out of college and travelled around Europe for three years. “That was fun because I had many unusual jobs,” Vornholt said. “I was an announcer at a western town in Spain and I also worked as a stunt-person in some West German westerns.”

With his adventuresome background and fondness for the novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs, it's no wonder *Masks* is an action adventure story.

“What's interesting about science fiction and *Star Trek* in particular is you can almost do any other kind of genre of book within the *Star Trek* universe. The genre is so pliable. *Masks* is a sort of sword and sorcery type of book, and *Contamination* is a murder mystery.”

Vornholt's favorite scene takes place deep within the *Enterprise* in the micro contamination labs.

Worf and Troi are led by a scientist through the various levels of clean rooms to the final room where Lynn Costa died. There is no dust or contamination at all in the clean rooms and those working in it, must wear suits to protect the air from them.

“On the show we only see a small part of the ship,” Vornholt said. “In reality the *Enterprise* is a huge ship, as big as the Paramount Studios lot and it's about 56 stories down. There's only a thousand people who live on the gigantic ship. The thing I like most about *Contamination* is the idea that there is all this stuff on the other decks that has never been shown. We know that on deck 31 there are science labs, but that's all we know. I extrapolated what I thought might be

down on deck 31. For me, that was the most fun.”

“The TV show, due to its nature, can't really give each one of the major characters something to do each week. That's why I think the books are so popular. In the books you have a chance to give everybody some good moments and some really good stuff to do!”

In addition to giving each character something special to do, Vornholt likes to have the action take place away from the main bridge.

“The TV show does scenes on the bridge so often and so well, that both of my books have very few scenes on the bridge. To me, that's the interesting thing about the books, You can get off the bridge and see other parts of the ship or go to another planet. I don't really want to try and redo what the show does.”

One of the best subplots in the novel came from a suggestion by Paramount. When they noticed that Vornholt had placed Troi and Worf together they asked him if he remembered the episode, *The Child*. John did remember and he also remembered the friction between Troi and Worf.

At the beginning of the novel, Troi has still not fully forgiven Worf for suggesting her child be destroyed to save the *Enterprise*. As the novel progresses, Troi works through her anger and feelings toward Worf. It's a great insight into Troi's character.

Vornholt's advice to would be writers is to remember that, “The key to really writing good books is to be able to write a good outline before you start the novel.”

Writing outlines is something with which Vornholt's non-fiction writing has helped. He also suggests you write about something that will look great on the book cover.

“I've always thought they picked *Masks* because they knew the idea of a culture that wore masks all the time would make a great cover.”

Having finished his second novel, Vornholt is planning his third *Star Trek* title.

“I guess I got caught up in the next generation.”



The search for the mysterious assassin by Counsellor Troi and Lieutenant Worf, makes for intriguing reading in John Vornholt's second installment of The Next Generation series, *Contamination*.

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