Dixie Trek '88 is no alien to the DeKalb County galaxy

By Chuck Bell

Starfleet Security

Anyone who happened to drive by the Sheraton Century Center hotel at just the wrong time over the past weekend could have been forgiven for thinking that DeKalb County was being invaded by aliens.

Although some of the characters moving in and out of the hotel looked like they could have come from a galaxy far, far away, they actually came from a great deal closer than that. Oh, there were a few from outlandish places like Chattanooga, Montgomery and Baton Rouge, but most of them live in the Atlanta area.

And when they're not dressing up like Starfleet officers, Klingons or Dr. Who, they are normal people doing normal things — mostly.

What brought all these people together in DeKalb County was Dixie Trek '88, the eighth annual convention sponsored by the Atlanta Star Trek Society.

Hundreds of fans attended. Some of them were fans of science fiction and fantasy in general. Others were dedicated Star Trek fans. All of them were having a good time.

There was a lot for them to do. They could view classic episodes of the original Star Trek television series, play science fiction games such as Traveler, browse in a dealers' room where games, models, comic books and all sorts of Star Trek memorabilia were available for purchase, or visit with famous personalities such as Julie Newmar (Catwoman on the old "Batman" TV series), Jonathan Frakes (First Officer Riker on "Star Trek: The Next Generation") and Nicholas Courtney (Alastair Lethbridge-Stewart on "Dr. Who").

An international Star Trek fan organization called Starfleet advertises itself as being dedicated to the spirit of "infinite diversity in infinitesimal combinations." The guests at Dixie Trek seemed to personify that idea.

Each attendee had his or her own reason for being there. For example, Beth Walden, a fifth-grade teacher from Alabama, said she came simply because she likes Star Trek. She's not interested in any science fiction in any other form nor does she have any desire to actually travel in space. She just likes Star Trek.

Then there was Bertha Ray of Norcross, who explained, "I've got two children. I'm here watching them."

Some of them used the convention as an excuse to dress up as their favorite characters. Chris Davis, of Stone Mountain, dressed as Lela, the knife-wielding, semi-sav-
Lela in the TV series. For one thing, she is at least a foot too short. But that didn’t matter. For a few hours last Saturday, she was Lela.

Then there was Courtney, who was joined by writer Terry Nation (creator of Dr. Who’s relentless enemies the Daleks and originator of the “Blake’s Seven” TV series) in a free-wheeling discussion that delighted convention guests. They spoke on subjects as diverse as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, televangelist Jimmy Swaggart and the quality of American television.

Courtney’s comment on Mrs. Thatcher was succinct: “I loathe her.”

Nation offered the opinion that Swaggart is a great actor.

American television, the two of them agreed, has its moments.

Nation, who now lives in California and has written scripts for “McGyver” said that American television “at its best is marvelous and at its worst is as bad as anything we have in England.”

Courtney said Americans think of British television as being very good “because you only get the cream here. Actually, there is a lot of rubbish on British television.”

Science fiction, as this convention revealed, is mostly fun and games. But there is a serious side to all of this as well. Pat Roberts, executive officer of U.S.S. Republic, the local chapter of Starfleet, is a good example.

Roberts said “Star Trek” sparked his interest in science in general and spaceflight in particular. It led him directly to Georgia Tech, where he earned a degree in aerospace engineering. Now he is preparing to go to work in the aerospace industry, at either Lockheed or McDonnell Douglas.

“I want to really go where no man has gone before,” Roberts said. “I think we have the ability to make it happen in our lifetimes.”