

# Speculative Realms

TUESDAY, JUNE 1, 2010

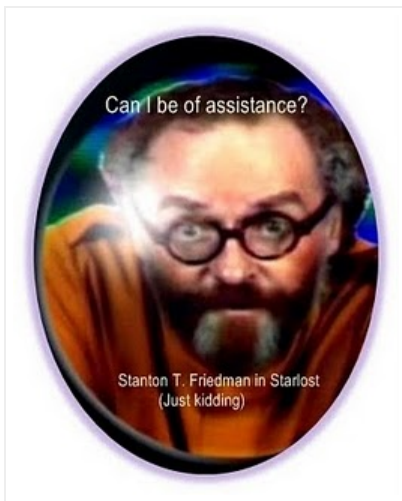
## Ham and Egger Review: The Starlost—A Mind Altering Experience Without the Jail Term

Starring [Keir Dullea](#), [Gay Rowan](#), [Robin Ward](#)

Created by [Cordwainer Bird](#) (a.k.a. [Harlan Ellison](#))

Being a ham and egg actor, confined to community theater productions staged in broken down old elementary schools, I've developed a taste for the cheap production, the set-bound movie, paper mache monster masks, and cheap, cobbled-together sci-fi television set to weird music and written by the sci-fi masters.

One of these last was a show called [The Starlost](#). It featured [Keir Dullea](#), [Gay Rowan](#), and [Robin Ward](#) as Amish types who discover, through Dullea's prying, that their little Amish-like Community is actually one biosphere among many attached to the earthship Ark, launched into deep space in an effort to save a dying humanity.



In the premiere episode of the series, Devin, played by Dullea, "David Bowman" in [Stanley Kubrick's 2001](#), starts asking uncomfortable questions. For starters, he wants to marry Rachel, played by [Gay Rowan](#), but she has been assigned to marry Garth by the community's matchmaking computer. Devin questions the validity of the computer's choices. For his blasphemy, he is banished by High Amish Priest [Sterling Hayden](#).

Devin makes his way to a part of the biosphere that contains a

portal. There is an inscription on the portal that threatens any who dare to pass through it with death. The blasphemous Devin, Copernican to a fault, ignores the warning and enters the portal, thereby diving headfirst down the rabbit hole.

He comes across a reference computer displaying an interface with human features that call the image of [Stanton T. Friedman](#) immediately to mind.

"Can I be of assistance?," the computer asks.

When Devin asks for information about where he finds himself, the computer levels a cultural shockwave upon Devin that devastates everything he was brought up to believe. Even as his own reality is effectively smashed, Devin learns that this new reality he finds himself in is itself about to be obliterated. Through an accident, the Ark has been knocked into a collision course with a star. To make matters worse, the bridge personnel are all dead. There is no one flying the ship.

It is all up to a rebel Amish Guy to do something about it. With Garth and Rachel's help, Devin embarks on the task. Three simple Amish folk lost in

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Plain Dealer

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Las Vegas Review - Journal

Jake Kelly/Las Vegas Review-Journal » Buy this photo Annie Jacobsen's nonfiction book on Area 51 has sparked criticism from men who worked at the secret installation in the 1960s. Jake Kelly/Las Vegas Review-Journal » Buy this photo By Keith Rogers For ...

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Daily Mail (blog)

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space trying to save what is left of humanity from annihilation.

Only from the mind of Harlan Ellison could spring the outrageous juxtaposition of the Amish with deep space exploration.

The best science fiction is dependent upon the establishment of mood and visual discord. What we see has to be discordant enough with the reality we know to make us believe it to be a reality from another time or place and familiar enough that we are not completely freaked out. The imagery of a piece is vital to that end. The Coca-cola commercial that appears in the rain-soaked darkness of ruined [Los Angeles](#) in *Blade Runner* is a case in point.

Music is vital to the establishment of mood. Is *Psycho* or *Halloween* as scary without their respective musical scores? *The Starlost* is renowned for its weird music. Odd sounds abound in a kind of magic mushroom stream of consciousness that provides an undertow to what you see and threatens to drown you in reverie in the process.

For the brain to accept something as strange or new, it has got to have images that conflict with and simultaneously complement each other and music that is weird at best or nonordinary at the minimum. *Starlost* has got that.

It also helps if the creators have manufactured conflictual structures into the script.

Ellison provides discordant structure right off the bat by simply placing the Amish in outer space. By doing this, he not only makes the assertion that Amish culture has a better shot of surviving into the future than more so-called advanced cultures have, but he also lays the structural foundation, through the unlikely juxtaposition, for an experience of the *The Starlost* as the weird representation of the future it most assuredly is. He preps our perceptions through the use of an absurd premise and in the absurdity of the premise thematically evokes, I think quite successfully, a strange universe.

Ellison's original screenplay won the *Writer's Guild Award*. Of course, the Studio didn't use it. It followed, then, that, naturally, Ellison thought *The Starlost* was crap. But he also thought *The City on the Edge of Forever* was crap. His original script for that show also won a *Writer's Guild Award*.

The sets and costumes are cheesy, very much on par with *Starlost's* contemporaries, *Doctor Who* and *Space 1999*. What those shows had in common with *Starlost* visually was a kind of hippie-trippy feel. The sets looked at times like the discos and go-gos of the 60s and 70s: basic geometrical shapes, nondescript technological form-factors, vivid, flashy colors, short skirts, low necklines, long hair, and, most especially, weird music—all required accoutrements for the acid-washed sci-fi brain of the era.

Keir Dullea anchors the action as rebel, learns-as-he-goes Amish Guy Devin. His former rival Garth, a crossbow-wielding Blacksmith, played by a big-haired Robin Ward, gets over his loss in the Rachel competition and becomes Devin's wing man. Rachel, played by Gay Rowan, eventually forges an identity of her own. She is less Devin's squeeze and more an equal partner as the series comes to a close.

*The Starlost* struggled out of the gate and never was able to put down roots, which was a shame. They made only 16 episodes. Many of those were really good. And if you put *The Starlost* on your Netflix list, you'll get a chance to see some of the great character actors of the day. [John Calicos](#), [Percy Rodriguez](#), [Frank Converse](#), and [Ed Ames](#) all show up in major parts. Walter Koenig, Chekov from *Star Trek*, puts in some time as Oro, the Alien, in two episodes.

Some people have been trying to stir up momentum for a remake on Netflix Reviews. It would make a good project for M. Night Shyamalan.

If you get bored with the torture porn and CGI of today's horror and sci-fi, I recommend *The Starlost* as a change-up. It hits the brain just the right way. It is a mind-altering experience without the toxicity or the jail time.

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## The Starlost Fansite

### Starlost Episode Guide

"By the time the studio hacks got through with it, Ellison's marginally inventive premise (by his own admission) had been turned into a mindless video turd."

*The Starcrossed* by Ben Bova review by Chuck Rothman

Phoenix Without Ashes by Edward Bryant and Harlan Ellison

Posted by Gary Haden at 7:34 AM 

Labels: [Hamand Egger Review](#), [Starlost](#)

## 2 comments:

 [rolanddeschain](#) said...

would be a great remake

November 2, 2010 12:44 PM

 [Gary Haden](#) said...

It would be great if they could bring back the seventies with it, but that's too much to hope for.

November 9, 2010 7:48 AM

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 Religion  
 It is a tie  
 Not a fair question

Votes so far: 45  
 Poll closed

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