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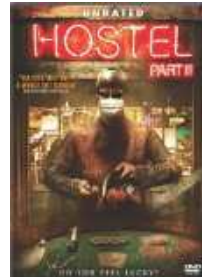
Review by [Jan Jane](#) | posted December 13, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#)

The Series:

A show that was far ahead of its time both technologically and thematically, *Captain Power And The Soldiers Of The Future* was created by Gary Goddard, the man probably best known for bringing *The Masters Of The Universe* to the big screen in live action form with Dolph Lundgren on board as He-Man. Shot on a massive soundstage in Toronto, Ontario to keep costs down, the series lasted only one season, showcasing twenty-two episodes that aired on syndication between 1987 and 1988 when it was eventually cancelled. While it was a short lived affair, there are those of us who were kids when it aired who remember it fondly as Mattel, who bought the series to base a toy line off of it, came up with a pretty neat gimmick for it. See, if you bought the right Captain Power toy, you could shoot at specific light targets that appeared on screen during each and every episode, which made it sort of an interactive experience. Many of these toys would also come with VHS tapes, so you wouldn't necessarily have to sit in front of your TV and wait for an episode to air before you could play, instead you could pop a tape in your player and blast away to your heart's content.

As to the show itself, it's set in the year 2147 where, in the last fifteen years or so, robotic soldiers called Bio-Mechs have made human soldiers obsolete and with wars being fought entirely by machine, they became more and more common. In order to stop this and override the machines that control the Bio-Mechs, Dr. Stuart Gordon Power (Bruce Gray) and his associate, Dr. Lyman Taggart (David Hemblen), work on a supercomputer called the Overmind - but Taggart soon decides to take charge of the project and attach himself to it in order to speed up the project. The results are disastrous and Taggart leaves the experience a changed man, now obsessed with the concept of perfecting machinery by merging man and machine together as one functional being. He tries to use Overmind to make this happen but it winds up sending humanity into a massive conflict with the Bio-Mechs leaving Doctor Power desperate to stop his former partner. To do this, he creates 'Power Suits' - which are basically some fancy suits of armor - which are incredibly powerful when worn by the right people. Taggart tries to stop Power from doing this during a fray in

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which Gordon has to save his son, Jonathan, from Taggart. Gordon dies in the process, Taggart gets severely injured and becomes more machine than man after the bout, and Jonathan is left to use the Power Suits to assemble a team good enough to stop Taggart from destroying what's left of the world. As Taggart takes on the new identity of Lord Dread, Jonathan Power leads a team of four soldiers dubbed 'The Soldiers Of The Future' against him using the Power Suits and their own supercomputer, Mentor, which Gordon Power designed in his own image and with his own intelligence to help his son save the planet from certain doom.

So those Soldiers Of The Future mentioned above? They are Maj. Matthew "Hawk" Masterson (Peter MacNeill), an air operations specialist; Lt. Michael "Tank" Ellis (Sven-Ole Thorsen), a heavy weapons specialist; Sgt. Robert "Scout" Baker (Maurice Dean Wint), a communications expert; and Cpl. Jennifer "Pilot" Chase (Jessica Steen), the pilot of the Soldier's specially designed ship and Captain Powers' love interest. These four, along with Powers himself, will run into various players from Powers' past and their own pasts that will complicate things, have to deal with the effects of Lord Dread's tactics on civilians, and be wary of the schemes that Dread will put into place in order to stop them. Imposters and traitors will rear their ugly heads and interference from would be Soldiers Of The Future will put many lives in danger. As the series reaches the end of its twenty-two episode run and Lord Dread comes closer to finalizing his 'Project: New Order' plot to do away with humanity once and for all, it all comes to a head, but sadly, the cancellation of the show means it'll never properly run its course.

The twenty-two episodes that make up this series are:

DISC ONE:

Shattered / The Abyss / War Dogs / Final Stand / Pariah / A Fire In The Dark / The Mirror In Darkness / The Room / The Ferryman

DISC TWO:

And Study War No More / The Intruder / The Rose Of Yesterday / Flame Street / Gemini And Counting / And Madness Shall Reign / Judgment / A Summoning Of Thunder Part I / A Summoning Of Thunder Part II

DISC THREE:

The Eden Road / Freedom One / New Order Part I: The Sky Shall Swallow Them / New Order Part II: The Land Shall Burn Them / Retribution Part I / Retribution Part II

Captain Power And The Soldiers Of The Future was one of those rare shows that tried to appeal to adult and children viewers alike, which proved to be both a blessing and a curse. It was a blessing in that it let the writing team play with some interesting themes and ideas and this made for some fairly intelligent sci-fi TV viewing, but it was a curse in that by letting some mild adult themes into the show, it wound up coming under heavy criticism. The series was widely criticized for being too violent for kids and the use of mild cursing like 'Hell' and 'damn' ruffled some feathers, as did some sexual innuendo, some bits being more subtle than others. On top of this, there was the use of Nazism as an allegory (Lord Dread has a crew of young people who further his cause who are referred to as the 'Bio-Dread Youth!'), which didn't sit well with certain parties. These criticisms, which were really increased in so far as how the series was marketed to kids more so than adults (particularly with the toy line tie in), would ultimately wind up hurting the series and coupled with increasing production costs for the live action series, well, you can see in hindsight why it was a short lived affair.

As to how the series holds up by modern standards, well, technology has changed a lot in the last twenty plus years, especially in terms of computer animation where things are now leaps and bounds ahead of

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where they were when this series was made. Thankfully, if the graphics look dated the live action aspect of the show (which constitutes the large majority of the footage) holds up quite well. Yes, there are times where the constraints of the budget come into play and not everything here looks perfect but the set design was done well and that holds true today. The costumes are also still interesting to see, a product of late eighties sci-fi envisioning if ever there was such a thing, and hey, you've got to appreciate how Lord Dread was so obviously the influence on The Borg who would, a few years later, become such a big part of the mythos for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The acting, too, is a few notches above your average kids' show, with the stand outs being Timothy Dunigan as the titular Captain Jonathan Power and David Hemblen as Lord Dread. Dunigan plays his role with noble conviction, while Hemblen seems to relish in playing his character with as much sinister influence as possible.

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The DVD:

Video:

Each and every episode of *Captain Power And The Soldiers Of The Future* was broadcast in 1.33.1 fullframe and that's just how each and every episode is presented on this DVD set. Though the series was shot on film, it was mastered on tape and it's from tape that these transfers were taken. As such, the image can be soft and there are minor roll issues here and there. Whether or not it could have looked much better than it does here is debatable, as it's impossible to know what sort of source elements were available but don't expect this material to look pristine, because it doesn't. Thankfully there aren't any compression artifacts to worry about or anything like that - but these do basically just look like good quality VHS tapes.

Sound:

The only audio option for the series is an English language Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo track, there are no alternate language tracks or subtitles provided. Quality of the audio is pretty good, really, with properly balanced levels and clean, clear dialogue. There are no problems with any hiss to complain about and the constant barrage of sound effects used throughout the series have some good punch to them.

The Extras:

Scattered throughout the set are a few commentary tracks, the first of which features Gary Goddard talking over top of the *Shattered* episode. The man who created the series, Gary talks about shooting the series in Toronto and some of the challenges that arose, as well as the similarities between Lord Dread and The Borg from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (noting that Lord Dread came first) and also talks about the use of computers, the state of CGI effects at the time and more. The *Pariah* episode features a commentary from writer/developer Mark Scott Zicree which, as you'd guess, is less conceptually oriented than Goddard's talk but no less interesting. Here he talks about the themes and ideas that the writers worked into the story and about character development in the show. Both of the two parts of *A Summoning Of Power* feature commentary from writer/executive story consultant J. Michael Straczynski who is joined by writer Larry DiTillio. Always an interesting guy to listen to, Straczynski has more to say than his partner here but input from both writers is welcome and again just adds to the depth to which this set goes to explain the stories behind the series. *Retribution Part I* and *Retribution Part II* both get a commentary from actors Tim Dunigan and Jessica sheen, which is nice in that it allows the set to explore the history of the show from the actors' perspective, so you can expect just that from these talks.

The rest of the extras are found on the fourth disc. Here, also of interest to fans, is the inclusion of a brand new feature length documentary entitled *Out Of The Ashes* that takes us behind the scenes of the series and sheds some light not only on the effects work that the show was famous for but also the character design, the storylines and more. Clocking in at over ninety-two minutes in length, here we find interviews with Gary Goddard, writer J. Michael Straczynski, Timothy Dunigan and more and in addition to that we get some interesting behind the scenes footage shot while the series was still under production. Also included here are some nice pieces of production art, including a character design piece by Jim Steranko among others. Of course, all involved discuss the conflicts that resulted from trying to make a show that was interesting to adults while still at least making a half hearted attempt to appease Mattel, who had obviously invested a lot of money in the series. Goddard talks more about some of the difficulties involved in the technical side of the production, Dunigan discusses his character in a good bit of detail and Straczynski talks about what the writing team tried to do to make this different than your average kids' show. All in all, it's quite an interesting and thorough piece, one which should make a lot of fans of this series very happy indeed.

Captain Power Season Two: Declassified is an eight minute bit that discusses why Straczynski left the show when Mattel wanted to be more involved in the show, how Larry DiTillio took over, and where the series was going to go had it been given the chance to go there. They discuss the way that the first season ended (which we'll skip here to avoid spoilers) and who that was going to impact the show, how new characters would be brought in, what would happen to Dread and more. This is quite interesting as fans have wanted details on this for years now.

The fourth disc also includes *Captain Power: The Legend Begins*, the feature length made for TV movie that has never been shown in the US before. This runs just under ninety-four minutes in length and video quality is about on par with the episodes contained on the first three discs in the set. This is basically a bunch of episodes from the first season re-edited into feature length form and while it isn't as rewarding or as layered as the series itself, it's a fun way to get a quick rundown of what this show was about and to understand its appeal.

Rounding out the extras are some menus, chapter selection, and a still gallery of character concept art. Inside the case, which fits inside a slipcase, is a booklet of liner notes which include a brief essay from Goddard and details on what you'll find and where you'll find it on the four discs that make up this collection.

Overall:

Captain Power And The Soldiers Of The Future really was an ambitious show that was quite a bit ahead of its time, and viewing it now through adult eyes, it's easy to see where the creative team and the 'kid friendly' marketing behind the show would clash over direction. The series holds up well, however, as an interesting, intelligent and exciting mix of sci-fi and adventure and it's nice to have the series not just on DVD but in a nice set that includes a wealth of extra features as well. If you can look past the fact that the video quality isn't amazing, then consider this one recommended.

Ian lives in NYC with his wife where he writes for DVD Talk, runs [Rock! Shock! Pop!](#) and has contributed to AV Maniacs. He likes NYC a lot, even if it is expensive and loud.

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Marc Zicree · UCLA

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