

**DWIGHT KEMPER'S
TREK TRACK:
THE FIRST FRONTIER**

TREK STARS GO WEST (1949-1968)

Color/B&W ♂♂1/2

D: Various. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley, James Doohan. 240 mins. (VSC, 2-disc \$19.95) 12/10

"Before they conquered space, they had to face the first frontier," says the legend on the DVD case. Here you will find four stalwart *Star Trekkers* in six different sagebrush shows back when TV was awash in westerns, and one spaghetti western feature starring Shatner. Of the quartet, Nimoy gets the short end of the cathode stick, either playing bit parts as Indians or city-slicker card hustlers. In the *Tate* episode *Comanche Scalps* (1960), he plays a "conniving Comanche." (It should be noted that ethnic roles were often inhabited by Caucasian actors in makeup back then, and Nimoy was cast in many such parts.) Given the times this short-lived series aired, one can forgive the less than positive portrayal of a Native American, but Nimoy does little more than ride a horse, briefly threaten our heroes with death when they refuse to let him see their guns, and capture a 14-year-old girl. *Comanche Scalps* doesn't exactly rep a breakout role for the future Mr. Spock. He fares no better in the *Bonanza* episode *The Ape*, where he portrays "Freddie," a card shark from Memphis whose dance-hall girlfriend becomes an object of attraction for Arnie, a Lenny-like muscleman (future *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein* thesp Cal Bolder) who thinks she's "awful purty." Yes, this is basically *Of Mice and Men* again, where Hoss Cartwright (Dan Blocker) takes on the role of a husky "George." Things don't end well for Arnie, who gets "awful mad" and goes berserk whenever he thinks someone is making fun of him. (It should be noted that if you're expecting to hear the famous *Bonanza* theme on this DVD, you'll be horribly disappointed. Presumably for rights reasons, we get a ghastly, and I do mean *ghastly* public domain western sound-alike theme.) An *Outlaws* episode, *Shorty* (1960), has Nimoy again playing a card hustler who also happens to be a gun-for-hire named "Lonely" Logan who says lines like, "Well, a little rooster sired himself a beanpole." One thing about watching Nimoy in these shows is that the early Leonard can't act. His performance in each of these shows is stilted, as if he isn't really comfortable with faking emotions, which I suppose is the main reason the role of Mr. Spock was really the star-making vehicle for him. The only other item of note about this *Bonanza* episode is that it was written by *Star Trek* producer and writer Gene L. Coon.



Faring better is William Shatner, who, no matter what part he plays, is William Shatner. But at least here he has roles with some meat on them. In the prophetically titled two-part *Outlaws* episode *Starfall* (1960), Shatner portrays the leader of a band of rustlers who are offered amnesty if they settle in a dusty western town and give up their outlaw ways. Complicating matters is the town's leading citizen (future *Bewitched* costar David White), who wants nothing better than to see the outlaws swing by a rope. Jack Warden plays an outlaw whose love interest is a ticklish dance-hall girl played by future *Mary Tyler Moore Show* star Cloris Leachman. The feature film *White Comanche* (1968) casts Shatner in the dual roles of the title character and his cowboy brother. Shot in Spain in 1968 during Shatner's tenure on *Trek*, this stinker really did nothing to advance his career. As usual we have Spanish actors portraying Indians, while Shatner plays a peyote-consuming "white Indian" wearing a headband and war paint. It's weird watching Shatner emote against himself.

Disc 2 also presents an early episode of *The Lone Ranger* (1949) with extremely young guest star DeForest Kelley as Bob Kittredge, in need of the masked man's help when bandits want to obtain the Circle K Ranch. James Doohan's role as an "angry villager" is shown in a brief excerpt from the TV series *Last of the Mohicans*. This is followed by a full 26-minute episode where, under the name "Jim Doohan," he appears as an angry Indian named Tonkawa. Again, there's not a single actual Native American in the whole tribe. And the heap big Tarzanesque lines Doohan and the other red men must speak is not historically accurate either, paleface! This set is certainly a treat for TV historians, but you really have to be a super fan of these *Star Trek* stars to endure some of the tedious scripting and bad acting. The visual quality varies widely, from fairly good (*Tate* and *The Lone Ranger*) to degraded VHS level (*Outlaws*) to old 16mm print (*White Comanche*). If you're a Trekkie who just has to have absolutely everything associated with your fave TV show, then *Trek Stars Go West* is for you. ♂

TELE-VIDEO

PARAMOUNT HOME ENTERTAINMENT
(3-disc \$36.98) 10/10

TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE: THE FINAL SEASON (1987/1988) ♂♂♂♂

D: Various. Deborah Harry, Arnold Stang, Divine, David Gale, Antony Carbone, Patricia Tallman, Stephen McHattie. 432 mins.

This fourth season of *Darkside* reps many of the series' biggest thrills and scares. Some of the best episodes include the season opener *Beatles*, adapted by Robert Bloch from his short story; the Clive Barker-adapted tale *The Yattering and Jack*; Jodie Foster's directorial debut *Do Not Open This Box*; the Tom Savini-directed *Family Reunion*; my wife's all-time fave *Darkside* episode *Sorry, Right Number*, adapted by Stephen King from his story and directed by John Harrison; one of my personal fave episodes *Love Hungry*, featuring a diet plan in which the food actually comes to life and begs you not to eat it (ending in a gruesome revelation), and *Basher Malone*, the season's, and series', final episode, about a down-on-his-luck boxer fighting a demon. In addition to the above-mentioned, other directors who contributed to Season 4 include Frank De Palma, Allen Coulter, Katarina Wittich, Christopher T. Welch and Anthony Santa Crone. Other contributing writers include Mark Patrick Carducci, Theodore Gershuny, Bob Balaban and Michael McDowell, with appearances by Vic Tayback, Brinke Stevens, Kim Greist, Eileen Heckart and Gary Lahti (late of Romero's finest film, *Knightriders*), among many others. With the fourth season, *Darkside* was really hitting its stride, but Romero and Company elected to end the series on a high note and begin a more ambitious new skein, *Monsters*, no doubt to compete with the then-new, bigger-budgeted HBO cable show *Tales From the Crypt*. (We certainly hope *Monsters* soon joins the digital disc ranks.) Extras include two one-shot episodes that ran as possible pilots for a more suspense-driven series, *Akhbar's Daughter*, helmed by Harrison, and *Attic Suite*, directed by Michael Gornick. So ends an exciting chapter in cathode-ray horror history, especially for nostalgic fright-fan Gen-Xers who were coming of age and watching *Darkside* during its initial run. It is certainly wonderful having this complete series on disc to revisit time and again. And remember, "The Darkside is always there...waiting for us to enter...waiting to enter us. Until next time...try to enjoy the sunlight!" ♂

—Rob Freese

NITE TALES

In other anthology developments, E One Entertainment debuts the five-episode *Nite Tales* (\$19.98), featuring Flavor Flav as your "master of scaremonies," plus guest stars Essence Atkins, Gary Busey and "Tiny" Lister.