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Tricorder update #18

Captain's logs - all of them

Conjuring up a sense of each show and reminding us of our favourite scenes

Dear Nelson,

In the 16th century the ship-log was a quadrant of wood attached to a length of knotted string. To estimate the speed of the ship, the ship-log was thrown into the water over the stern of the ship, and as it dragged in the water the string played out and the ship's speed was measured by the time taken for each of the knots to pass through the operator's fingers. A record of the speed (in knots) was maintained for the benefit of navigating. Over time the log record was expanded to include notes about other important day-to-day activities for posterity and the ship's or Captain's log as we know it was born.

In the Original Series, as well as being a neat throwback to the Enterprise's seafaring ancestors, the Captain's logs perform a very useful expository function, saving time and production budget without the need for sets or expensive scenes by quickly summarising key elements of the plot as the episode begins, or by moving the story on at pace during the middle acts, when things can get a bit bogged down.

As fans, of course, the Captain's logs are so much more to us than a budget saving gambit. They conjure up a sense of each show, reminding us of our favourite scenes, audio stepping stones that take us through a rich mental mind map of all the Enterprise crew's greatest moments. From the earliest stages of this project, we wanted the tricorder to be able to store and play, if not all, as many of the Captain's logs as possible.

In the early days of the project, it was obvious that locating all the logs and extracting the audio of just the actor's voice, in almost every case, without any other background music or sound effects (NOTE: there are sometimes some tiny noises, a groaning Gorn or the odd medical beep accompanying McCoy's log for example), was not going to be a quick or easy task. To do so we knew that we had to go back to the original audio stems

recorded at the time of filming, and for that we were going to need some serious assistance. Cue the archivists at CBS – as fans themselves they knew how important this was to us and the tricorder project and, right from the off, they were incredibly supportive and helpful. All they needed from us were the episode details and the timecodes of each of the audio clips, which they could then use to search their archives... I say all they needed, there are 79 fifty-minute (NOTE: episode lengths vary) episodes containing, as it turns out, some 233 Captain's and ship's logs, so the task of locating, transcribing and cataloguing each log was daunting.

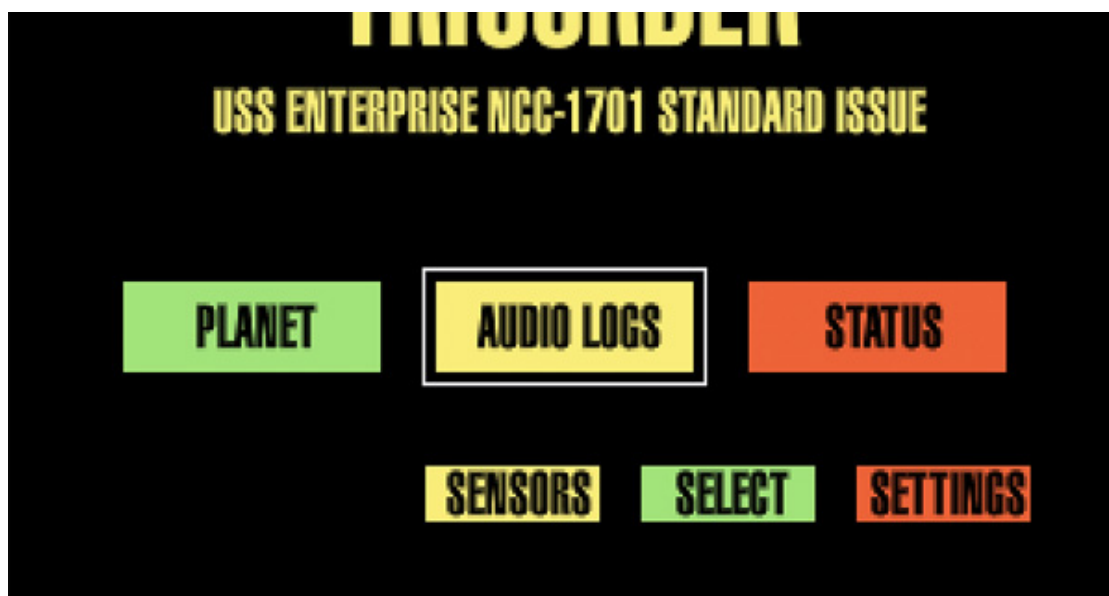
In order to make the task a little easier, initially a small program was written to search all the episode transcripts for the word "log". Once a candidate transcript segment had been identified in this manner, that part of the episode was watched carefully to verify the audio clip included a Captain's log and the time code of the clip was noted and passed to the CBS archive team who used it to narrow their search for the requested audio track. Although time-consuming, over a twenty-four month period, this process initially provided 207 clips of clean audio which although came mainly from Kirk, also included a number of logs from Spock (15), Scott (8), McCoy (5), Sulu (1), and Decker (1).

As we began to realise that we actually had a realistic chance of getting all the Captain's logs, we also realised that in order to be able make that claim, we had to be absolutely sure we had every last one of them. Although our catalogue looked complete, the nagging thought that we might have missed one or two, meant that we had to carefully watch the entirety of every episode to make absolutely certain that we hadn't overlooked any. Andrew Stockdale set off on an epic 65-hour TOS binge-watching mission and located a further 26 logs we had missed! Of course, there is always the chance that despite our efforts, there's still a tiny bit of Captain's log audio that has slipped undetected through our processes. But as of now we are fairly confident that we have the full set so that for the first time, fans will be able to listen to all the Captain's logs in one place in the original audio that Kirk et al, laid down when the Original Series was filmed.

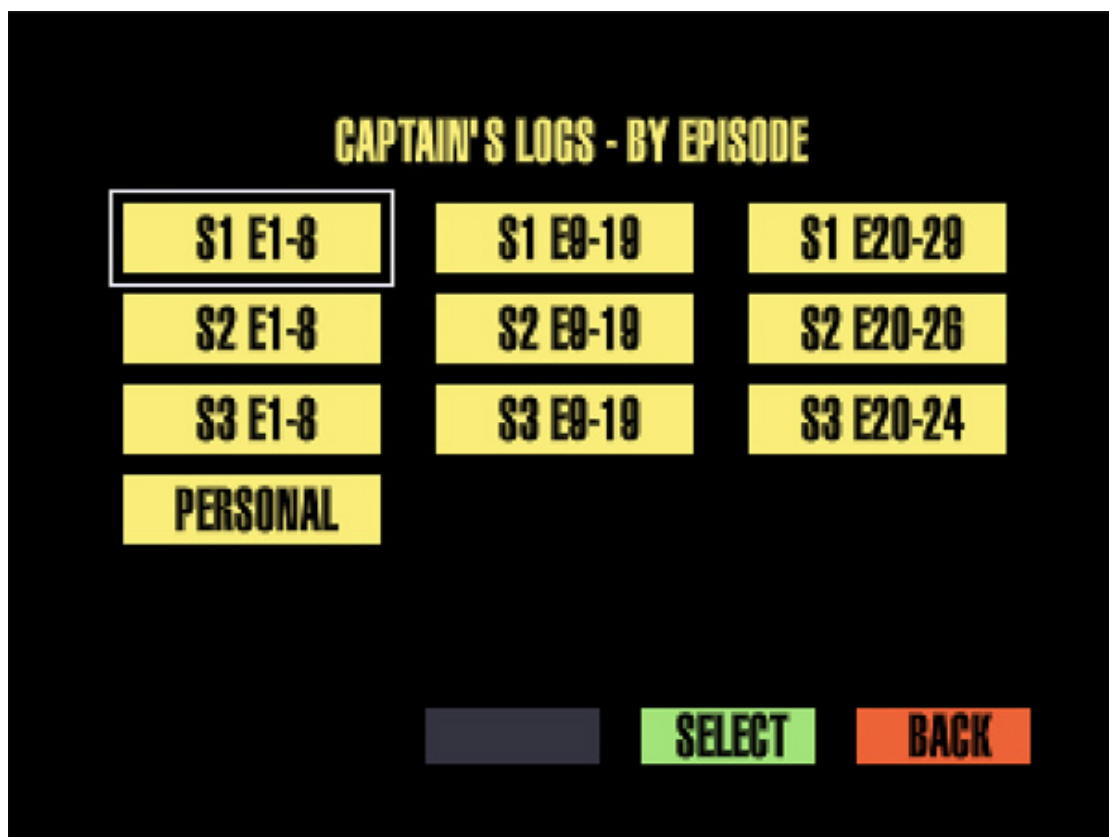
The Captain's Logs are accessed from the tricorder's main home screen. The tricorder has three buttons. The three menu boxes at the bottom of the page show the functions of these buttons, which change depending on the screen. The left and right buttons are momentary single click-action switches, whereas the centre button is a five-way jog switch.

Using the jog switch to highlight and then select the required function on each screen will allow fans to navigate through the 233 Captain's Logs stored in the tricorder memory to play the one they want.

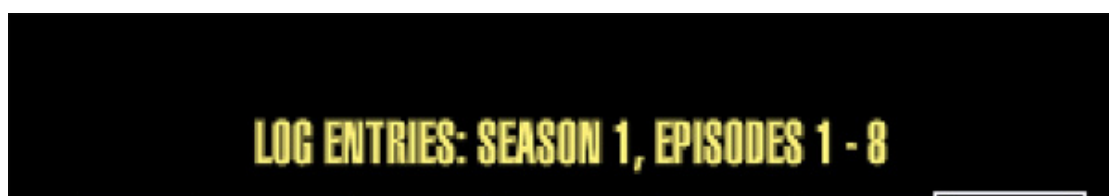




Screenshot showing the tricorder's home screen. Jog the centre button left or right to highlight AUDIO LOGS, then press it to display a top-level view of the three seasons' Captain's logs.

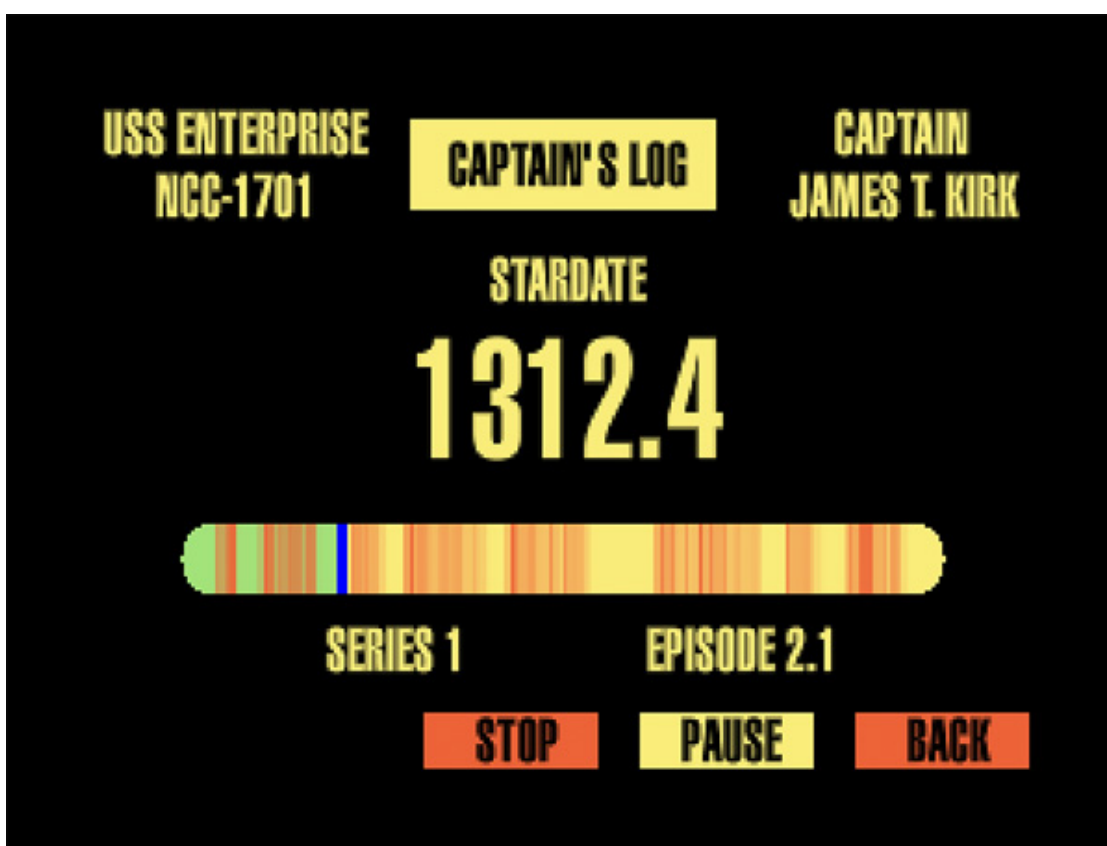


The centre button is jogged to select the season and episode range, and clicking it displays those Captain's Logs.





The centre button is used to highlight and then select the required Captain's Log.



The Captain's Log can be played, paused or restarted. As it plays the blue line moves along the bar tracking the position in the audio file.

There are a lot of logs to look through, so to make things easier, the files will be cross-referenced by episode name, number and a text snippet, on a dedicated webpage so that users will be more easily able to search through the catalogue and find the Captain's log

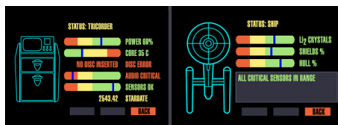
they're looking for. The audio files will only be available to listen to on the tricorder.

Any personal logs that you record using the tricorder's recording function can be accessed from the first Captain's log screen by selecting the block marked PERSONAL.

Right from the beginning of this project, as capabilities go, the recording and playback of the original Captain's (and ship's) logs felt fairly fundamental to the tricorder's imagined in-universe function, so we are really pleased that with the help of CBS we have been able to realise this part of our tricorder vision.

LLAP

Chris



Coming next time:
Status screens



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