

# SATELLITE NEWS

THE OFFICIAL MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 FAN SITE



## SPECIAL FEATURE

A while back, **MST3K** creator **Joel Hodgson** approached us about posting what he described as twenty questions only he could answer about the show. Of course, we eagerly agreed. We dumped a huge number of questions on him, and from that pile Joel chose the questions he felt most like answering, and put the following piece together. And so without further ado, **Satellite News** presents:

## TWENTY QUESTIONS ONLY



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**Q.** Why "3000"?

**J.** I was always fond of science fiction shows with numbers attached to their titles, like *Space: 1999* and *Sealab 2020*, which I think was a Hanna Barbera cartoon-- anyway, you know what I mean. Also, this is just before the 90's started and people were already applying 2000 to the end of their names. I particularly remember **George Bush's** *America 2000* campaign. I just wanted to pick something that would sort of jar and captivate people. They would hear 3000 and think it was the year 3000, I was hoping it would sort of disorient them and prepare them for the strange message they were about to receive.



**Q.** So "3000" isn't even a year?

**J.** No. If you notice any of the press from when I was with the show, I would always deny it being the year 3000. I thought of it more as a series number, like the **Hal 9000** computer or the **Galaxy 500**. I guess the difference is **Arthur C. Clark** and the Ford motor company had the vision to pick a number that couldn't be confused with a year. Besides, it doesn't make any sense to have these characters living in the year 3000 when all their points of reference are from the pop culture of the 80's and the 90's. To quote the theme song, "In the not too distant future-- next Sunday A.D." It really means next Sunday! I'm writing this on a Tuesday, which is May 18th. That means the show takes place next Sunday, which is May 23rd.



Visit our [archives](#) of the MST3K pages previously hosted by the Sci-Fi Channel's [SCIFI.COM](#).

**Q.** So if 3000 is a series number, what is the series that this would be the 3000th version of?

**J.** It's at this point I again quote the theme song: "Just repeat to yourself it's just a show, I should really just..." -- no, seriously, to get deeper into the eschatology of the show-- the Mads were sort of these scientific heretics of **Gizmonic Institute**, they were banished for the other atrocities they created in the lab. I don't think I have to remind you that the Mads are depraved characters and will do anything for status or power, including shanghaiing a janitor and making him watch bad movies, then packaging it into a cable show. The Mads attached the 3000 to make it look like it was the 3000th version of the experiment, you know-- sort of spruce it up a bit. Obviously, they were lying and it was only the first version.

**Q.** So that is why they were in **Deep 13**?

**J.** Exactly. They had grabbed Joel and pushed him into the Gizmocrats satellite, then launched it into space. Then, through a diabolical cover up, made the authorities think Joel had stolen the ship on his own, had a mishap and had destroyed himself and the Satellite of Love. Yes they were banished from Gizmonics, but they just moved down into Deep 13 to tap into the Gizmocrats hardware to track Joel and the Bots.

**Q.** Just hold up-- why weren't the Mads in Deep 13 from the very first show at **TV 23**? The Mads didn't start living in Deep 13 until the show moved to national TV.

**J.** Good question. I think there are two answers to that: time and money. The first twenty shows at TV 23 were really a workshop. I didn't walk up to **Jim Mallon** with a finished script and a show bible for **MST3K**. I just had a few drawings of a set and some robots and a some silhouettes in theatre seats. He said "okay" and I went home and decorated the sets and made the puppets. I also called **Trace Beaulieu** and **Josh Weinstein**, and we all showed up to shoot the pilot (also, a tip of the old top hat to **Kevin Murphy** for cutting the theatre seats out of foam and fabricating the first doorway sequence). When we did the pilot, I sort of pictured this guy pirating a signal and then this story unfolding of him building this satellite and these robots and watching these bad movies. It was okay, but it was sort of hard to understand. Then a friend of Jim's suggested we make a theme song to explain the story, and this is where the Mads came from. Josh and I wrote it into the theme song. "His bosses didn't like him so they shot him into space." Then when we shot the theme song, we dressed up Josh and Trace and had them mouth the words. That was the beginning of the Mads. It just grew from there, and I might add, made the show better conceptually. This all happened within the first few weeks. When we got commissioned to do the show for **Comedy Channel**, it was time to retool and get a little deeper into the story, and that brought the fulfillment of what Gizmonic Institute looked like and the invention of Deep Thirteen. We had the time and resources to flesh out these ideas.

**Q.** Why is there such a marked difference between the look of the sets and the models between the first and second seasons on Comedy Channel?

**J.** Well, we had more money and more time the first season than we did at TV 23. When we got signed to do a second season for the Comedy Channel, we had more money and more time than the first season. These production deadlines are murder, especially if you're a group of people who had never really built a TV series before. But after that, I was extremely happy with the story and the look of the show at the beginning of season two-- everything was working together. I felt like it was finished conceptually. So if you're looking for conceptual congruity, start looking for it at the beginning of season two of the Comedy Channel.

**Q.** Why did you ...

**J.** What number question are we at?

**Q.** I don't know...um, seven.

**J.** Great, go ahead.

**Q.** Why did you name **Crow** "Crow?"

**J.** The name Crow was inspired by a number of things. I thought it would be cool to have a robot with sort of a Native American feel to it. I had a friend a friend in college who had a friend named **Tommy Crow** he had all these adventures with. I always thought that was such a cool name. Also the **Jim Carroll Band** had a song called "Crow" on the album "Catholic Boy." If you listen to the song, it's easy to picture the character of Crow.

**Q.** What about **Tom Servo**?

**J.** The name Servo came from a vending machine at the Southdale shopping center in Minneapolis. They had this great vending machine that was shaped like a robot called Servotron. I just pulled Servo from that. Then later, as the character developed at TV 23, Josh Weinstein (who performed the puppet) added the "Tom." Josh told me he thought of it sort of like those DJs on local radio shows who always had an on air nickname-- well Servo's on air nickname was "Tom."

**Q.** What about **Gypsy**?

**J.** Gypsy was the name my brother gave a pet turtle he had. I always thought it was so peculiar. I knew Gypsy was going to be big and slow, so Gypsy was the logical choice.

**Q.** What shows inspired you in the conception of **MST3K**?

**J.** I think the most direct link is to the **Douglas Trumble** film *Silent Running*, which had a huge influence on me as a kid. I think **Bruce Dern** did a great job, and it's such great subject matter-- a hippie in space. I knew I was backward engineering ideas from that film and as time went on, I noticed some connections to other shows-- particularly *Beanie and Cecil*.



*Beanie and Cecil* was the first cartoon I remember watching and I think there are analogies. The **SOL** is sort of like **Leakin Lena**. **Joel** is like **Beanie**. **Servo** is like **Captain Huff-n-Puff**. **Gypsy** is sorta like **Cecil**, and **Dishonest John** is like **Dr. Forrester**-- there's even a **Crow** that shows up occasionally in the Crows nest! On a bigger level, I was in love with a show called *The Children's Film Festival with Kukla, Fran and Ollie*. If you get a chance to see it, I think it too is strangely similar.



**Q.** We're familiar with *The Children's Film Festival with Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, but for the benefit of readers who might not be, how would you describe it?

**J.** Basically, it was a show on CBS and I would guess it was on in the early seventies. Each

week Kukla, Fran and Ollie would host a different international film and sort of talk about it along the way. I just think it's very close structurally-- a human host with puppets watching a movie.



**Q.** You are greatly admired by your fans, both for your creativity and, if you don't mind us saying so, for your ineffable charm. Are you comfortable with the idea that some people see you a role model?

**J.** I didn't know you thought I had ineffable charm. Just kidding-- absolutely. It's always a great compliment when I find out that some of my work has inspired someone else to try something creative. It's really what it's all about. That's why I did what I did-- others inspired me. But if you think you aren't creative that's cool, too. I think being around people who aren't creative is kind of refreshing and nice.

**Q.** What about your presence on the Internet-- any thoughts on that?

**J.** Yes, mainly I would like to apologize to all the people who have posted looking for me and wondered where I was. I feel bad that I haven't been able to dialogue with you. The internet is a total inversion of television. It's the opposite. So I can't very well start answering questions from one person and then move on to the next. It's just too hard. During the early days of the **gizmonics.com** site, I tried to answer questions, but it just was no fun for me. It just felt like homework.

**(Satellite News note:** In early 2001, Joel felt he wasn't getting a good return on his investment in the **gizmonics.com** web site and let the registration for the domain expire. It was subsequently snatched up by a "cybervulture" company and now serves as a portal to an adult site.)

**Q.** So you're saying you've never gone online and entered a chat room as "Joel?"

**J.** Nope, never. It's just too intense.

**Q.** In your recent interview on [Talkspot.com](http://Talkspot.com), you did mention going into a chat room disguised as someone else, right?


**J.** Only once, probably four years ago. I was hanging out with a friend of mine and she said, "You have to check this out-- the MSTies are having a fight over who's better at hosting the show-- Joel or Mike." So we read this war between people, fencing around arguing about who they like better-- Joel or Mike. It was a war. Well the moderator came in to break it all up and say something like "They're both good in their own ways, and I thought we agreed not to fight about this any more." Everyone had calmed down and was smoothing out their feathers and saying they were sorry and then my friend and I wrote, "Yeah, but when you think about it, Joel's better!" And then we took off.

**Q.** So the only time you've ever been online is in an interview situation and that one instance you just mentioned.

**J.** Right, and if you have talked to Joel in a chatroom, you've been hoodwinked. What number are we at?

**Q.** Sixteen.

**J.** You know, I'm really tired of typing and thinking about how my answers are going to affect future generations and checking my spelling and all-- would you mind if we just left it at sixteen?



**Q.** No problem. It's been an honor.

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