Star Wars

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Gays vs. Straights! Blacks vs. Whites! Politics vs. Science! Condom Nazis vs. Bug-Chasers!?! Let's replay 10 top AIDS tiffs from a decade of life during wartime

1. ACT UP vs. TAG. It was tense enough when an elite band of treatment wonks left ACT UP/New York to form TAG (Treatment Action Group) in 1992. But the influential young Turks (with David Geffen on the board) truly enraged their forbears two years later when they asked the FDA to *slow* approval of Roche's protease inhibitor, saquinavir, for a longer trial to show how best to use it. They failed—and saquinavir hit the market about as fast as it failed most takers, thanks to its weak dose. No wonder treatment types now rally for "Drugs into trials!" as loudly as they do for "Drugs into bodies!"

2. Donna Shalala vs. Needle Exchange. Early in the Clinton era, hopes were high that the administration would lift the ban on federal funding for needle-exchange programs, which boasted a strong record of reducing HIV infections. But it kept never happening…so activist wrath focused on Secretary of Health Donna Shalala, who made no move because her boss feared a "soft on drugs" rap. In 1997, *POZ* pitched in with a monthly tally of "Shalala Infections": new HIV cases linked to dirty needles. Even Elizabeth Taylor said she wanted to kick the tiny, timid Shalala. In the ass? we asked. "Yes!" the diva cried with glee.

3. HIV vs. AIDS. The divide between these two terms grew in the mid-'90s, when HAART held the dread AIDS at bay for many (but not all). The quick changes in *POZ*'s own taglines say it all: from the feel-good "Health, Hope and HIV" ('96 to '98) to the get-mad "Because AIDS Isn't Over" (an ACT UP steal). One year later, it was "We're all over AIDS"—a double-entendre to mirror the "A" word's own split image: full-blown beast roaming much of the world, but semi-tamed into "HIV" here at home.

4. Larry Kramer vs. You-Name-It. In *POZ*, the author-activist has hissed at everyone from Bill Clinton ("the third asshole in a row in the White House" on AIDS issues) to La Streisand (who "pissed on [his AIDS play] *The Normal Heart* for 10 years" by stalling her promised film version) to mourners at the funeral of *POZ*'s Stephen Gendin: "You people on HAART are selfish…. You feel OK now. You won't for long." Has Kramer's lifesaving 2002 liver transplant sapped some of his legendary bile?

5. Anonymous Testing vs. Names Reporting. AIDS advocates got hopping mad over right-wing Rep. Tom Coburn's (failed) 1997 push for a national registry of people with HIV. But they

went ballistic the next year when one of their own—advocacy stalwart GMHC—failed to explicitly oppose such a proposal for New York. GMHC backpedaled, stressing its support for blind reporting *only* (to track HIV stats and set Ryan White funding). No matter. New York nonetheless became one of 36 states that report HIV cases by name to the CDC.

6. White AIDS vs. Black AIDS. With HIV rates soaring among both gays and blacks, the fight for scarce funds can turn ugly. In 1997, *POZ* reported on charges by black advocates that white, gay, well-heeled ASOs were grabbing grants intended to serve poor communities. In 1999, the feds found that a quarter of blacks—haunted by the Tuskegee syphilis scandal—thought the U.S. developed HIV to wipe out their race. And in 2003, *POZ* explored stats showing that HIVers in black Harlem were dying at 2.5 times the rate of their white Chelsea counterparts.

7. Drug Ads vs. The Diarrhea Disgruntled. Pharma's hot 'n' healthy print-ad HIVers—such as the infamous Crixivan mountain climber—got Beltway insider Bob Hattoy bitching to *POZ*, "They'll never show us farting and puking." A few years later, veteran PWA activist Jeff Getty demanded that San Fran ban "unrealistic" ads in public places. Even the FDA told drugmakers to cool it with the decathletes. But the real-life HIVers soon posing for the ads shot back in our July 2001 cover story. Said Glenn Rivera, once the face of Zerit, "The idea that I look too healthy to be in an AIDS-drug ad is absolutely absurd!"

8. HIV-Causes-AIDS vs. The Denialists. The AIDS establishment has long railed against the "flat earthers" claiming that HIV *meds*, not the virus, cause AIDS—such as UCLA's Peter Duesberg, PhD, who once said that mainstream science "cannot claim to have saved a single [PWA's] life." A cabal of such contrarians hijacked San Francisco's ACT UP, leading original members to rename themselves Survive AIDS. In *POZ*, one Survivalist dissed the dissidents as "psychopaths" for scare tactics such as making obscene phone calls to researchers and assaulting other activists.

9. Big Pharma vs. Universal Treatment. The storm started at 1998's world AIDS confab, where poor-world PWAs had to walk by lavish booths for lifesaving drugs they couldn't afford—"an obscenity on par with feasting in front of starving masses," wrote Mark Schoofs in *POZ*. But thanks to activists like Treatment Action Campaign's Zackie Achmat (who won global attention for refusing HIV meds until South Africa agreed to give them to all PWAs), knockoff meds from scrappy outlets such as India's Cipla and such dealmakers as Bono and Bill Clinton, dirt-cheap generics will get to thousands of HIVers. Now it's pharma's move to make (that) millions.

10. Americans with HIV vs. George W. Bush. We could smell trouble when Dubya launched his term with plans to shut the AIDS czar's office. That didn't happen, but nearly everything else that could hurt us has, including a witch hunt on gay-serving AIDS groups, fake-science tarring of the effectiveness of condoms and a push to increase HIV testing while choking off funding for meds. Let's make the next big AIDS battle one that will count: voting out Dubya and his *real* weapons of mass destruction in November.

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