

The Final Frontier

By Gary Mitchel

Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise, her five year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before. When these words were first uttered on nationwide television on October 1966, history was made.

Last Thursday, Gene Roddenberry, aka: THE GREAT BIRD OF THE GALAXY; creator of Star Trek passed away from a blood clot. Roddenberry who had been ill for several months was 70. He was truly a visionary. What else can you call a man who managed to produce a TV show that contained a Russian, an Oriental, a black woman and an alien in the sixties, all working together for the good of everyone. Star Trek had clearcut ideals of its own. They were well ahead of their time. Some have already become standards of the present. Racial equality - extended to aliens, even an alien who seemed at first to be a viciously murderous monster (the Horta from Devil in the Dark) was only one such idea. And yet, when the show was on the air, there were riots in the streets, bombings and burnings, lynchings and assassinations.

Star Trek almost didn't make it on the air. Roddenberry, who was a Police lieutenant at the time, went to NBC to make his pitch for his idea. The presentation wasn't going to well so Gene decided he might as well relax so he took off his jacket and talked for another 40 minutes or so. The TV execs were spellbound. Later Gene realized that he was still wearing his gun. It was either that or they really bought his Wagon Train to the Stars idea.

This year is the 25th anniversary of the show that wouldn't die. The show has spawned hun-

dreds of books, four comic book series, six movies, a second TV series, fan clubs, songs and conventions too numerous to mention. How many times do you sit and watch an episode, for the twentieth time?

Why is Star Trek so popular? That's a hard question to answer, because if you ask 100 different people, you're going to probably get 150 different answers. Star Trek appeals to fans of all ages, and is still getting new ones. Compare the popularity of Star Trek to any other TV show. How many series have spawned major motion pictures? There is an entire industry built on the popularity of Star Trek. You may not like Star Trek, but you can't deny its effects. Everyone has heard of Star Trek. Any manufacturer would love for their product to be as identifiable.

My fondest memory of Star Trek is when William Shatner appeared on Saturday Night Live, and of course they had to do the obligatory Star Trek skit. So they're at this convention, everyone is milling around, wearing their costumes, some people with the pointy ears and such when Shatner gets up on the podium and just rips into everyone saying, "Get a life, it's only a television show. You've taken something I did as a lark and turned it into a big waste of time. You, yea, you with the ears. How old are you, about 30? Ever kissed a girl? Still live at home, eh?" Shatner continues to berate the audience for about five minutes continually tearing down Star Trek the institution, and he really looks like he's enjoying himself. He then leaves with the entire audience in shock after having heard their hero speaking to them like this. Someone, obviously a con organizer argues with Shatner and threatens not to pay him for his

appearance. Shatner gets back up on the podium and says 'That was of course the evil Captain Kirk from the mirror universe'. Everyone applauds and everything is back to normal.

The first convention was held in New York, January 1972. They expected 300 people. After the first 3000, they stopped counting. Every major news outlet in the US sent reporters, except NBC, after all, they cancelled the show on the first place. Gene and his wife Majel attended the convention. The only description you could put to their faces was "stunned." Gene kept repeating numbly, "I just don't believe it. All these people here just to honor Star Trek." From there, it snowballed, conventions now commonly attract 20,000 plus people. Gene Roddenberry on Star Trek: "Star Trek was trying to say some other things. That was to be different is not to be ugly. To be different is not necessarily to be wrong. That for different people, different lifeforms under different situations, there may not be just one truth, there may be many truths. If we don't start living together and respecting each other, we're not going to make it to the age of Star Trek a multiracial, even multi-life-form show - I'd say the principal greatest pleasure I've had out of Star Trek is the fact that these ideas of mine, these philosophies, have been so strongly received. Movements started on the campuses - as you recall, Star Trek came out in the days of getting heavily into the Vietnam War. Star Trek was very anti- that type of thing. And the fact that the students on campuses grabbed hold of it was a source of great pleasure to me ...

That Star Trek was a show that said something and had points of view and whither man, and who am I, and to what ends am I; and

other shows just simply haven't wrestled with this. One of the funny things about Star Trek is, with that appeal



... that is, saying there is a tomorrow, and tomorrow can be more challenging than yesterday, and all these things that appeal to young-minded people {that's} something that's been constantly missed by the networks and other studios..."

Stanly Kubrick set a new standard for visual science fiction with his motion picture 2001: A Space Odyssey; his accomplishment is a landmark against which all others will be judged. Just as Kubrick changed the face of motion picture SF, so did Gene Roddenberry establish a new level of quality for television science fiction. No more Time Tunnel, no more Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, no more Lost in Space. In effect, Gene Roddenberry was saying, "Let there be a believable and realistic format, a background against which to tell fantastic and

dramatic adventures. Begone with your childish fantasies—from this point on, television science fiction will

become mature." Star Trek didn't always reach this goal of course—but at least, it was trying.

Star Trek wasn't the first place the concept of men exploring the galaxy appeared, but then again Shakespeare wasn't the first writer to deal with Troilus and Cressida. Shakespeare just did it a little bit better, and so did Roddenberry. The difference is that when Shakespeare was through with Troilus and Cressida it was regognized as the last word on the subject and no one else attempted it. Roddenberry's Star Trek, however, will not stand out as a landmark, it will stand as a challenge. The series will be regognized as the best statement of the form only until someone betters it. And it will be. Television demands that it continue to top itself.

Live long and prosper.

Goodbye Mr. Roddenberry

by Nico I. W. Van Kats

Gene Roddenberry died on Thursday afternoon, October 24th, 1991, approximately one month after the first classified Star Trek episode aired 25 years ago.

I heard the news late that night while working on an astronomy assignment due the next morning. My roommate had fallen asleep while watching the news and I had been too mentally involved to bother turning off the set. Yanked away by the mention of heart attack, and the name of the creator of the Star Trek phenomenon, my mind was set a drift into internal reflection.

Recalling one happy Christmas Day, I remember receiving a star Trek utility belt when I was an extremely young energetic toddler. The view screen in the living room displayed long greenish hue face with pointy ears and stone cold

eyes staring stoically towards me. Lifting up my communicator in that Kirk-type manner, I flipped open the antenna and commanded, "One to beam up Mr. Spock."

My young brother and I embarked on many missions as Spock and Kirk. The house was Starship, the car a shuttlecraft, the woods was some planet, and the school playground was filled with many different forms of alien cultures.

These childhood times were the best of times for many individuals like myself worldwide. Mr. Roddenberry was the focal point in bringing together a group of talented management, engineers, technicians, writers, scientific consultants, and actors for the public to see through a magnifying glass to a more desirable future for humankind.

The story plots reflected this more desirable future of humankind. They contained moral mes-

sages submerged in a format of high paced action and sometimes comedy.

Mr. Roddenberry was vigilant in keeping his female black officer on the bridge of the Enterprise. A basic statement of human rights was expressed by keeping Lieutenant Uhura, a black woman character, on the set, during a period of time when it was not favourable to do so.

Mr. Roddenberry selected his staff and crew on the basis that all individuals would work together like one big family. The set was often described as continually full of laughter. The interviewed cast members of the new series, The Next Generation, which Gene Roddenberry was currently working on was far from happy the Friday after his death.

Gene Roddenberry was a very unique man, he had a vision of the



The Present Cast: Geordi, Captain Picard, Riker, Data Back Row: Guinan, Dr. Crusher, Worf, Troi, Wesley Crusher

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