

# Lost in space with new Canadian sci-fi series

By RICK SPENCE

"To boldly go where no man has gone before!"

Watch out, Captain Kirk, you're being followed — straight into "space, the final frontier".

Star Trek was the first feature ever to successfully combine the far-out concepts of science fiction with the medium of television. Now, Star Trek's example is being followed, and by a Canadian production company, no less.

The Starlost represents the biggest effort ever made in Canada to produce a TV show for the international market — a project bigger than The Forest Rangers (remember them?), Police Surgeon, and even the ill-fated Whiteoaks of Jalna. Glen-Warren Productions out in Agincourt at the CFTO-TV studios are sinking a lot of talent and money into the effort, and have so far achieved some success.

The Starlost tells the story of Earthship Ark, speeding through space in the year 2790. Within its biospheres dwell the "descendants of the last survivors of the dead planet earth" (as a droning voice informs us at the beginning of each episode). The pods simulate different, authentic earth environments, and the people in them live just as their ancestors did back on earth centuries ago.

But, during the several centuries that have passed since that time and the "present", some (again unclear) catastrophe overtook the entire crew, the ship's bridge and its nuclear reactors, thus wiping out those men and machines which alone could control the craft.

The hero of The Starlost, a young man named Devon, played by Keir (2001) Dullea, grew up in the semi-rustic community of Cypress Corners. Curious, Devon tries to ask questions

in this static society, and learns that the trusted village elder (well played in the first episode by veteran Sterling Hayden) is a deceitful fraud.

For this "blasphemy" Devon finds himself exiled. But he discovers the secret door that leads to the catacombs of the ark, and he, his girlfriend Rachel (Gay Rowan) and the young village blacksmith Garth (Robin Ward) make their escape into that strange, glittering, deserted world.

Consulting a seemingly ubiquitous information system, the trio learn the origin of the ship, and the fact that none of the crew has survived. Then they learn the most horrifying fact of all — the Starlost is off course, drifting helplessly into a collision course with a blazing sun!

And so the nature of the series is revealed. Devon, Garth and Rachel must attempt to understand the miracles of 28th century technology, and somehow put the starship back on course, so that it might fulfill its sacred mission.

The pilot script and concept were created by the famed (and controversial) prolific science fiction writer, Harlan Ellison, writing in this instance under the pseudonym of Cordwainer Bird. Ellison, however, dropped out of the show very quickly, and is reportedly thankful that his real name isn't connected with it. For The Starlost is unsatisfactory in several ways.

The main problem is that science fiction, with all its concepts and speculations, is designed to be read and imagined. It has rarely done well graphically, on the screen or on television. A new budget-cutting technique of video-tape editing, being used for the first time, allows the images of the actors to be superimposed on miniature, intricately detailed, paint-

ed backdrops, filmed separately — but when the two scenes are viewed as one, the result is often somewhat annoying.

The close-up shots of the ark are also shoddy-looking. The model itself just doesn't stand up under close scrutiny; but then neither did the Star Trek Enterprise.

Acting in The Starlost is another problem. Keir Dullea, who mumbled his way through 2001, still hasn't learned to act, and his portrayal of the young rebel Devon doesn't ring true. Gay Rowan and Robin Ward (two Canadians) perform well in their admittedly secondary roles, and their parts should be expanded.

Guest stars, when on the level of Sterling Hayden or even of Canadian Lloyd Bochner, who appeared in a recent episode, are fine, but all too often the small parts are played by more non-actors, who seem not even to understand the lines they are speaking.

But to be fair, the scripting is no big deal either — the latest episode revealed such gems of dialogue as "You'd be pretty in a space suit" and "Would you mind switching on the automatic pilot doohickey?". The scripting should improve, however, as former Star Trek writers have been hired for some later shows.

Any Canadian viewing The Starlost could instinctively recognize it as a home-grown product, but the series should not be dismissed just for that reason. Japanese, European and American (NBC) stations have picked it up for distribution. In fact Toronto is quickly becoming renowned as a centre for quality television and film production.

The Starlost is on the CTV network every Friday evening at 7, for those who wish to give it the chance it deserves.

## Sight and Sound

Because of early entertainment section deadlines on Monday, all announcements for the Sight and Sound column should be into the Excalibur Office (N111 Central Square) no later than the Sunday morning before publication. Notes, scribbles and untyped missives will be given low priority after clean, efficiently typed concise messages. Announcements which come in after the Sunday deadline run the risk of finding a new home in the entertainment waste-basket.

### Homage to Albers in York gallery

From October 26 to November 16, the York Art Gallery will host an exhibition of 20 paintings from the series Homage to the Square, to commemorate the investiture this Sunday of Josef Albers and Anni Albers with honorary degrees of Doctor of Laws. The show, fittingly enough, is entitled Homage to Josef Albers. The gallery is in N145 Ross, and is open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and on Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. Admission is free.

### Beguiling Clint Eastwood returns

This week, Don Siegel's The Beguiled weaves its web around Curtis LH-I at 8 p.m. Friday and Sunday nights in the Winters film program. Clint Eastwood is a wounded Union soldier discovered by a young student from a crumbling Louisiana girls' school during the Civil War. Sexual powderkeg turns into released repression and psychological horror. Bring your pacifiers. Everyone shells out \$1.25 except Winters students, who pay \$1.

### Classical Indian dance Saturday

Burton Auditorium will host a recital of South Indian classical dance Saturday night by Srimati Balasaraswati and company. Balasaraswati will perform the solo Bharata Natyam, playing all the characters herself, drawing from the entire mythology of the epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata), from the puranas (ancient stories) and from life itself. She will be accompanied by her two brothers and her daughter, all musicians. The recital begins at 9 p.m., and tickets may be purchased at the door for \$3, or \$1.50 for students.

### Bob Dylan in Hallowe'en horror

Is Winters trying to tell us something? They're running Don't Look Back, with the ever-popular guys and dolls team, Dylan and Baez, as part of their Hallowe'en Horror Festival. Ah well, the rest of the films are the shockers we've come to know and love: Val Lewton's I Walked With a Zombie and The Seventh Victim. The Oblong Box with Vincent Price, and The Conqueror Worm with Price again. Extra bonus is Big Night Out, with the Beatles, Sha Na Na, Mickey Mouse and others. Admission is \$2 for the public and \$1.75 for Winters students. The show starts tomorrow night at 8:30 p.m. in the Winters Junior Common Room, and continues until 4 a.m. with "free snacks" at 2 a.m.

### Underground animator in free show

American animator Stan VanDerBeek will screen and discuss his experimental films tonight at 8 p.m. at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Free admission.

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