

# STAR TREK

# MANIA

## The Superheroes Of Outer Space



Captain Kirk is the leader of the *Star Trek* crew. He is often called upon to make life and death decisions.

To those who follow, with a sort of religious fervor, the space odysseys of Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk, these superheroes need no introduction.

However, there are countless American mothers who think Mr. Spock is a baby doctor, and an additional number of fifty plus vets who remember the U.S.S. *Enterprise* as a World War II aircraft carrier. They are unable to understand the *Star Trek* mania—that mysterious malady that seems to have spread across the land infecting millions like an incurable virus.

To those of us not hopelessly addicted to this science fiction epic, the exploits of Dr. McCoy, Scotty, Lt. Sulu, Lt. Uhura, Nurse Chapel and Ensign Chekov seem to be an updated and more sophisticated version of "Flash Gordon," with a little mind-bending drama, and a lot of electronic gadgetry thrown in to intrigue the viewers.

However, to dismiss *Star Trek* as just another rocket ship show chronicling the space meanderings of stereotyped characters would be grossly unfair.

*Star Trek* is unquestionably unique in many ways. Aside from an abundance of good writing and a mind-boggling wealth of technical detail, it has become the series the network couldn't kill. There is something eerie about the fact that years after the last segment was completed, the actors have managed to achieve a measure of fame through the medium of a "ghost vehicle"—a network relic that has been peddled to other outlets.

The actors seem to have been locked into time and space, repeating their adventures over and over again for a devoted following of "Trekkies" who



Mr. Spock, as played by Leonard Nimoy, was half-Vulcan and half-earthling. His dual personality often led him into conflict.

seem to display the same unswerving loyalty toward their heroes as "Bogie" cultists or W. C. Fields fanatics.

For those not familiar with *Star Trek*, it can best be described with the lines

that introduced each show:

SPACE, THE FINAL FRONTIER. THESE ARE THE VOYAGES OF THE STARSHIP ENTERPRISE, HER FIVE YEAR

MISSION TO EXPLORE NEW WORLDS, TO SEEK OUT NEW LIFE AND NEW CIVILIZATION, TO BOLDLY GO WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE.



Dr. Leonard McCoy, the Medical Officer (played by DeForest Kelley), was a dedicated physician who fell intensely for his patients.

It was an ambitious undertaking, and *Star Trek* became the ultimate in escapism. The *Enterprise*, streaking through space faster than the speed of light, freed the viewer from his drab,

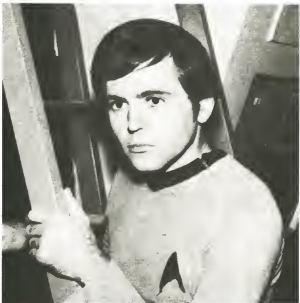
earth-bound surroundings, and whisked him away to exotic worlds far out in the galaxy.

Having once undertaken its mission, the *Enterprise* was a tight little world

in itself. It was, in a sense, far removed from the structured manners and mores of the earth, and because of communications limitations with the mother planet, its commander, Captain



Nurse Christine Chapel (Majel Barrett), in love with Mr. Spock, never has a chance to reach first base with the aloof Vulcan.



Ensign Chekov (Walter Koenig) was being groomed for leadership, and would one day have a commend of his own.

Kirk, took on all the dimensions of a minor deity. Unable to call to his superiors for instant advice, he had to face his own problems, making life and death decisions when faced with a wide variety of crises. Captain Kirk was the leader, a young father figure endowed with extraordinary reserves of inner strength and compassion who could weigh all the factors and then come to the right decision.

Close at hand was an equally capable crew who could be relied on to provide Kirk with expertise relating to their various fields. Perhaps what is most impressive to a non-fan researching the *Star Trek* mania is the extraordinary amount of detail that went into the creation and making of *Star Trek*. The object was authenticity and the show survived for three years as a network offering. It was cancelled over ten years ago, setting off a thunderous cry of outrage from loyal viewers. What was it about *Star Trek* that provoked such fanatical devotion? Why has it survived all these years as a repeat?

There is no question that *Star Trek* was peopled with believable characters. No matter how fantastic the setting or how bizarre the situation, Captain Kirk, Spock, Scotty, Dr. McCoy and the other members of the crew emerged as many-faceted characters who reacted to their various situations in a manner that could be easily accepted by the viewers.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating of those aboard the *Enterprise* was Mr. Spock, a member of an alien race called Vulcans. Closely resembling human beings except for pointed ears, arched eyebrows and tinted skin, the Vulcans were possessed of extraordinary mental and physical capabilities, along with the power of telepathy. The Vulcans were unique in that they placed a great deal of emphasis on rationality, and were seemingly without emotion. Thus, the First Officer of the *Enterprise*, Mr. Spock, was a rare individual. The offspring of a Vulcan father and an Earth mother, he was every inch the Vulcan—coldly logical. Still, because of his Earth heritage, he was sometimes forced to succumb to emotions. It was a weakness he didn't relish—one he tried to keep strictly under control. In a sense, he had a dual personality, and he tried desperately to suppress his human feelings.

Captain Kirk's second adviser was Dr. McCoy, the ship's Medical Officer.



Dr. McCoy, Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock are poised to meet still another threat during their odyssey through outer space.



The galaxy holds many bizarre creatures who come into contact with the crew of the *Enterprise*, and this is one of them.



This is another monster that gave the stalwarts of the *Enterprise* a few hehy moments.

If Spock gave the impression of appearing as a walking computer, Dr. McCoy was his opposite—an intensely emotional human being who became involved with his patients. Instead of being detached as a good doctor should be, McCoy let himself become vulnerable. He felt for his patients to the extent that their pain and suffering became his pain and suffering. Both he and Spock were often at loggerheads, approaching situations from different viewpoints. It was therefore often left to Captain Kirk to resolve the conflicts of emotions and logic that arose between the two.

As for the other members of the crew, the communications officer, Lieutenant Uhura, was articulate, representing the ship's ability to communicate. Mr. Scott was the man of action, able to translate orders and decisions into physical realities. Lt. Sulu, the helmsman, was the instrument of that action. Ensign Chekov was, in a sense, the backup quarterback who was being groomed for command. He had to observe and understand the decisions of Captain Kirk so that one day he too would be able to weigh the assessments of his advisers, and make the proper



This imposing figure is the ruler of Vulcan, a planet whose people are coldly logical and exasperatingly reasonable.

decisions.

Of course, like any other adventure series, even *Star Trek* was not immune to love, and that is where Nurse Chapel came in. She was in love with Mr. Spock. It was an affliction of the heart that was doomed for the simple reason that Spock would never let himself

become a victim of Cupid's little arrows. Nurse Chapel wore her heart on her sleeve, but Spock, true to his Vulcan heritage, remained aloof. Thus the viewer was left to speculate. . . would Spock ever relent? Would Nurse Chapel ever catch him in an unguarded moment when he might be susceptible

to emotion?

Of course, the *Enterprise* could not streak through space unchallenged. There had to be some measure of conflict—some enemy that would pose a constant threat. Captain Kirk and his stalwarts had two sets of enemies. The first were the Klingons—the person-



In the far reaches of space all is not mutants and monsters. This delectable dish would prompt any member of the *Enterprise* to go AWOL.

ification of all that was brutal, evil, repulsive and obscene. Nothing was beneath them. They were the Nazis and Russians of outer space except that they made Himmler look like a choirboy Hitler look like a church deacon, and Stalin look like a benevolent father figure. They were capable of committing the most atrocious crimes and being proud of their exploits. A normal Klingon was the type of guy who would steal the pennies from the eyes of a dead man, make the "Boston Strangler" look like a paragon of virtue and "Jack The Ripper" appear as a kindly old gentleman doing his civic duty.

They were first introduced into the *Star Trek* series in an episode written by Gene Coon entitled "Errand of Mercy." The story opened with the planet Organia suddenly being threatened by a Klingon invasion. With the butchers of the universe poised for an attack upon the peaceful and neutral Organians, it remained for Captain Kirk and his crew to step into the picture. At first, Kirk tried to convince the Organians that it would be to their advantage to allow the establishment of a Federation base on their planet. However, the unarmed Organians refused, insisting that they would be able to deal with the impending threat in their own way.

It was a situation that Kirk could not accept, being convinced that the Organians would be slaughtered by the rapacious wolves of the universe. When the Klingons finally arrived on the scene, Kirk became involved in a confrontation with the Klingon captain. Before the fireworks could start, however, the Organians quickly nullified the effectiveness of the weapons belonging to both belligerents making them offensively impotent. The frustrated Captain Kirk was enraged at this interference until he suddenly realized that his mission was to prevent war, not to engage in combat. Reluctantly, Captain Kirk and Captain Kor, the two adversaries, embraced a form of *de jure* that was carried over into other episodes.

The Klingons were the archvillains and they continued to pop up in episodes such as "The Trouble With Tribbles," by David Gerrold, "Private Little War," by Gene Roddenberry, "Day of the Dove," by Jerome Bixby and "Friday's Child," by Dorothy Fontana.

However, like today's two major ad-



versaries who seem to be engaged in a Mexican stand-off with each other, the Klingons and Earthmen could not fight or the result would be catastrophic.

The other space villains were the Romulans, and when a little action was needed in the form of dualing rocket ships, the Romulans admirably filled the bill with a little target practice and a few minor skirmishes that never resulted in a full-scale war.

The format of *Star Trek* was a flexible one, enabling the characters to take advantage of a wide range of themes. One segment, "The Trouble With Tribbles," was a fine example of comedy "Bread and Circuses" was pure satire; "I Mudd" employed farce, while "City On The Edge Of Forever" was a tragedy. "Space Seed" introduced the viewer to the dark areas of the mind, and "Errand of Mercy" was an old fashioned morality excursion. "Is There No Truth In Beauty" utilized the popularity of the soap opera, and "Who Mourns For Adonis?" was a study in theology. For pure melodrama, we were given "The Lights of Zetar," and the episode, "Spock's Brain," was an undisguised attempt at high camp.

If viewers were able to become immersed in the *Star Trek* episodes, taking part in the action through flights of fantasy, they were also able to become deeply involved with the characters.

*Star Trek* was not just a passing fancy; it was total involvement so that for many fans mundane pursuits became intolerable. Some female "Trek-kies" found it impossible after a mind-bending and emotion-draining trip through space to return to the reality of dirty dishes, un-made beds and demanding husbands. The inevitable result was wrecked marriages. Young girls became enamored of the leading characters on their favorite show. If Nurse Chapel was finding Spock infuriatingly unresponsive to her most obvious advances, thousands of young viewers were convinced that they could melt this cold Vulcan heart if only they had the opportunity.

Strangely enough, Spock seemed to be able to awaken the sexual demons in the hearts of the teeny-boppers even if he did look a little bizarre with his pointed ears and his funny eyebrows.

An alien with oddly tinged skin, Spock seemed to be possessed of the same magnetism peculiar to Count Dracula. He was not of this world,



Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy in a suspenseful scene from "Amok Time."



Mr. Spock and Second Pilot in the memorable episode "Where No Men Has Gone Before."

and if he was a little frightening, the ladies still found him fascinating.

The other members of the *Star Trek* team had their admirers, too, and fan clubs quickly sprung up around the country. Of course every performer, like every politician, and the proponents of every cause, know how fickle the public can be. However, there is

no doubt that the devotees of *Star Trek* were a breed apart. When it was first announced that *Star Trek* would go off the air, the network was swamped with tons of mail from shocked and outraged viewers. It was a collective cry of pain that NBC chose to ignore. To an unbiased observer, it still remains a mystery why the network, in the face

of such overwhelming viewer response, would proceed with plans to cancel the show. Of course, networks, like movie studios, are not famous for their wisdom, and *Star Trek* finally bit the dust.

Then it began to appear in re-runs, and that's when the great phenomenon began to take place. The loyalty of its



The Chief Engineer of the *Enterprise*, Montgomery Scott (James Doohan).

fans was undiminished and it began to attract new fans. A cult was soon established, and watching *Star Trek* quickly took on all the characteristics to a religious rite. Of course, not all the episodes were glittering gems suitable for enshrinement in the time capsule. Some were unmistakable bombs

but considering the pressures of time and costs, it is still amazing that so many good episodes were written and produced.

Today, the emphasis is on a return of *Star Trek* and devoted "trekkies" are mounting a determined campaign for new episodes. There is even talk

of a major motion picture. Surprisingly, NBC who cancelled *Star Trek*, now seems to be interested in putting it on again.

Many contend that *Star Trek* was a victim of the ratings system. If such were the case, it soon became obvious that the ratings were all botched up.



Spock and Kirk in a scene from "Day Of The Dove."



Spock, Kirk and friends in a scene from "Journey To Babel."



Ready for action in "Operation Annihilate."



Spock and friend in "The Enemy Within."



Scene from "Mark of Gideon."

If the selected viewers used by the Nielson people weren't watching *Star Trek*, millions of others were, and a random pulse reading was as accurate as a blind man's report on the All-Norton fight.

Inaccurate ratings supposedly prompted NBC to axe *Star Trek*. There was also the matter of soaring production costs. However, in the light of the tremendous viewer support, it still seems incredible that the network would have deliberately cut its own throat. Apparently, they thought the *Star Trek* fans were just a bunch of odd-balls who could be written off.

A number of popular TV shows have come and gone over the years but in the brief history of television, *Star Trek* holds a unique place. The "Trekkies" not only remained loyal but they have given birth to a new generation of addicts. *Star Trek* is as popular today as it was ten years ago. It isn't enough for these fans to merely watch *Star Trek*, they communicate with one another, they publish magazines and they attend conventions. They live in a sort of sub-culture; their feet may be carrying them down Main Street, Broadway or the old dusty trail, but their minds are streaking, along with the *Enterprise*, through the far reaches of outer space. They are agonizing with Nurse Chapel over her rejection by Spock, they are straining their little gray cells trying to reach a decision that may affect the lives of all aboard the *Enterprise*, as time runs out for Captain Kirk. They are just as incensed as Dr. McCoy when he is faced with the overwhelming questions of life and death. If the majority of earthlings are concentrating all their energies trying to find a parking space, the "Trekkies" are far away romping around the planet Organia confronting the Klingons. They are out-manuevering the Romulans, and making the universe safe for all lovers of peace.

The "Trekkies" are adventurers. They are explorers who, having run out of new frontiers on earth, are eager to embark on a perilous mission into space. The U.S.S. *Enterprise* is their escape vehicle, and Captain Kirk, along with Spock and the others, are their companions in this great adventure.

The survival of *Star Trek* over the years can best be explained by the amount of reality employed in the show. Every effort was made to make the future believable, and *Star Trek* was as far removed from Buck Rogers and



Spock liddles around with Vulcan harp.

Flash Gordon as the Space Age was removed from the horse and buggy era. The man most responsible for the quality of this show was Gene Roddenberry. A stickler for detail, he was willing to spend time, energy and money to create a series that would stand the test of time. Unfortunately, the network did not have the same

vision as Mr. Roddenberry. If he could not win the NBC brass to his cause, he certainly won the minds and hearts of millions of viewers.

*Star Trek* lives, and the reason it lives is simple. As Gene Roddenberry said, "We suspected there was an intelligent life form on the other side of the tube. We planned to use our

show to signal some thoughts to them. Never in our wildest imaginings did we expect the volume and intensity of the replies that we received."

What is *Star Trek* mania? Perhaps it is the ability to shake off the shackles of earth, and go "...boldly where no man has gone before." ●