

STAR TREK

With *Star Trek* currently enjoying its last run on BBC Television right now, Starburst's Queen of Trivia, Sally "Bones" Gary, jots down a few thoughts about how the series has fared with the passage of time and reveals a few little known facts about the show.

S*tar Trek* is one of those tv phenomena that seems to make hardcore science fiction fans see red, yet has survived with its own following and won the admiration of a much broader audience since the series was cancelled, back in 1969. Almost immediately, it began appearing on the BBC network in Britain, which was when I first became aware of Kirk, Spock and all.

Science fiction fans and John Brosnan notwithstanding, *Star Trek* was and is a good tv show. Especially when compared to what was being churned out by the American tv studios at the same time. I mean, *Lost in Space*. . . really! (Everybody must know the old story by now about how the CBS network turned *Star Trek* down because they already had their own sf show. . . yep, *Lost in Space*!)

Just what it was that made *Star Trek* so good has been analysed in dozens of books and fanzines, and I have no intention of raking over those old coals here. Rather, this is a collection of personal thoughts and favourite trivia items from the three years that went to make up *Trek's* 79 episodes.

I remember one of the first things that surprised me when I first saw *Trek* (was it really 15 years ago?) was that the women characters dressed in trendy mini-skirts and wore contemporary style make-up. Why? Surely female military personnel, on active duty, would have found trousers more comfortable? Bearing in mind that the crew of the Enterprise was supposed to be about 400 people, presumably half of them women, where did they keep their spare tights? With that amount of women, they'd have needed another ship to fly behind the Enterprise, just to carry the nylons.

Then there were all the other women that the crew of the Enterprise – well, Captain Kirk, really – met on their voyages. Great little costumes most of them were nearly wearing.

See, where the sf fans have gone wrong in looking at *Star Trek* was that it wasn't, and could never be, pure science fiction. Producer Gene Roddenberry knew that he had to disguise his science fiction to make it acceptable to the pre-*Star Wars* general audiences. The skimpy costumes didn't really detract from the sf stories being told, and most men I know still remember the girls' costumes better than anything else about *Trek*. So it worked.



The costume designer on *Trek* was a guy called Bill Theiss. His problem was that he had to make the *Trek* costumes as revealing as possible, without incurring the wrath of the Broadcast Standards Department. It was quite easy, really. There was a clear list of do's and don't's when it came to what you could show on network tv in those days. You couldn't show the underside of a breast. You could show as much of the topside as you liked, but the underneath was a no-no. The navel was also forbidden territory. . . just don't ask!

Theiss got around this problem using the "Will they/won't they" approach. He figured that the girls' costumes would look sexier according to how insecure he could make them look. That is, a girl's costume seems more. . . interesting if it looks like she's going to fall out of it any second. Hence, will she/won't she.



Another approach Theiss used was to bare parts of the body that were harmless enough, but weren't normally seen naked. Like, for example, revealing an actress' leg from the ankle to the hip. And it worked. But these approaches

were not without their problems.

With most of these costumes, bras were out. Which meant that Theiss had to find other means to keep the boobs he worked with firmly in their place. After all, they were only supposed to *look* as if they might fall out any second.

Some of the more notable costumes were to be found on Leslie Parrish in *Who Mourns for Adonis*, Sherry Jackson in *What Are Little Girls Made Of?* and Angelique Pettyjohn in *The Gamesters of Triskelion*.

Another key factor in the *Star Trek* format could be summed up in one word: Spock. While Spock could never have carried the show by himself (William Shatner was recently reported to be receiving twice Leonard Nimoy's *Star Trek 4* film salary of \$2 million) his constantly warring Vulcan and human halves made him the most compelling

Left: William Shatner as Captain James T. Kirk. Above: DeForrest Kelley as Dr. "Bones" McCoy. Right: In *What Are Little Girls Made Of?* Dr Roger Corby (Michael Strong) chats to Kirk, while Ruk (Ted Cassidy) and Andrea (Sherry Jackson) look on. Below: The good ship U.S.S. Enterprise.



supporting character in an sf tv series. Strangely enough, though Spock's parents were mentioned in the third broadcast episode of the show, *The Corbomite Maneuver* – Spock compares the face of Balok with that of his father! – we never did get to meet them until episode 44, *Journey to Babel*.

Still on the subject of Spock, we come to the origin of the famous Vulcan Nerve Pinch. In the script for *The Enemy Within* (ep.5), in which Kirk goes through the transporter system only to emerge as two Kirks, one good the other bad, Spock was to belt the bad Kirk over the noggin

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with the butt of a phaser. Not a very Vulcan gesture, you'll agree. Nimoy himself provided the answer. He demonstrated a routine to director Leo Penn where he gripped the base of Shatner's neck between thumb and forefinger. Kirk went down like a sack of potatoes and the rest – as they say – was history.

Remember those neat little devices Dr McCoy used to use to examine assorted wounded Security men, the frequently deranged Kirk and any alien creatures he might stumble across? They appeared for the first time in the Salt Vampire story, *The Man Trap* (ep.6). The idea was that Kirk was to use alien salt shakers to lure the creature into a trap, so the props department hunted high and low for alien looking salt shakers. When the director, Marc Daniels saw them, he felt that they were too alien and audiences would recognise them for what they were supposed to be. So they became McCoy's medical sensors instead.

Funnily enough, the rubber suit of the Salt Vampire turned up in a later story, *The Squire of Gothos* (ep. 18). It can be seen, quite clearly, propped up near the villain Trelayne's front door (Trelayne is the powerful alien who trapped the Enterprise in a force field and was revealed at the end of the story to be an unruly alien child who had slipped away from his parents for a while).

One of the most bizarre tasks McCoy ever faced was when he encountered the silicon creature in the story *The Devil in the Dark*. In this tale, workers on a mining planet are being picked off, one by one, by an unseen monster. As it happens, when the crew of the Enterprise finally corner the creature, Spock probes its mind and discovers that it is only a mother protecting its young. But not



Above: Susan Oliver as Vina in *The Menagerie*. Below left: Sherry Jackson in *What Are Little Girls Made Of?* Below: A scene from *Amok Time*. Right: Leonard Nimoy as Mr Spock with friend. Far right: Not a behind-the-scenes shot on the set of *Star Trek 4*, but McCoy and Kirk in *The Deadly Years*.



before the unfortunate creature has been seriously hurt by Phaser fire. Kirk asks McCoy if there is anything he can do for the beast, and McCoy delivers one of his best lines in the show: "I'm a Doctor, Jim, not a bricklayer!"

Just about the best ever episode of *Star Trek* was *The City on the Edge of Forever*. This was science fiction drama at its best. No monsters, no ray guns, just Captain Kirk faced with the most difficult decision he would ever make in his career. The plot had McCoy accidentally inject himself with a crazy drug and leapt screaming through a portal to the past, where he ended up in New York during the depression. Kirk and Spock decide they have to go after him and in doing so Kirk meets a nurse, Edith Keeler (played by Joan Collins in her pre-*Dynasty* days) who spends all her time caring for the poor and campaigning for peace. It's

Edith who has taken care of McCoy until Kirk and Spock arrive (tricky stuff, time travel). Kirk falls in love with Edith only to discover that he must let her die so she won't delay America's entry into World War 2 through her peace efforts. A tough one for the Captain. The tale was written by the caustic Harlan Ellison, though much has been made of the fact that the script was substantially rewritten by the series' producer Gene Roddenberry (The original Ellison version can be found in *Six Science Fiction Plays*, Pocket Books, 1976).

What made this such a powerful segment of the series was in its basic plot. The idea that Kirk had to make an agonising decision made *The City at the Edge of Forever* not just great *Star Trek*, but great drama, too. When you think about it, there's only so many stories that could be done within the *Trek* Format.

Kirk changes alien civilisation for the better. Kirk defeats slimy monster. Kirk outsmarts super-computer. And Kirk must chose between the Enterprise and...

The Choice story is far and away the most compelling in this short list. The other plot-lines are just hack adventure stuff that we've all seen dozens of times before. Even the choice story is predictable. We know that Kirk is going to chose the Enterprise over Edith. But we suffer along with him as he makes that inevitable decision. And there's nothing any of us like better than to watch our heroes suffer.

The last episode of the first season marked the first and only story in which William Shatner appeared in a role other than that of Captain Kirk. The plot involved the invasion of an Earth colony by flying jellyfish that entered the victim's nervous system and gave him a hard time. And it just happens that the infected planet is the home of Jim Kirk's brother, sister-in-law and nephew. When the Captain finds the dead body of his brother, we can see that Shatner is playing both parts. As the corpse of George Samuel Kirk, Shatner has grey hair and a moustache.



While Kirk was suffering his way through this story as a bereaved relative, Spock was suffering in a much more physical way. His alien system invaded by the flying jellyfish, Spock spent most of the episode fighting off the controlling powers of the creatures, evidently in very great pain. Nimoy's acting performance was just dynamite and went a long way to saving a rather ho-hum story.

The stories I've considered here are all first season episodes. Space dictates that I'll have to leave the second season for another time... and the less said about *Star Trek's* third season, the better.

But *Trek* fans can take heart that the Enterprise will continue to cruise the Galaxy as long as the feature films continue to rake in the box-office dollars. And right now that looks like it'll be for a long time to come. Tough luck, Mr Brosnan!