

The United Starship Enterprise.

The Monsters of "Star Trek"

Aliens were not monsters on "Star Trek" —
they look alien because of the accident
of being born halfway across the galaxy.

"Star Trek" was (and still is) unique in a number of departments. It was the first adult science-fiction TV series with a continuing cast; it presented essentially human dramas while remaining true to a scientific basis; it achieved a thoroughly integrated vision of a civilization 200 years from now; it assumed an optimistic view of human potentials...

But probably the best way to set "Star Trek" apart from other science-fiction—whether books,

movies, or TV—is to examine the show's way of dealing with monsters.

What qualifies for monsterhood? "The Boston Strangler" was monstrous, but not a monster; *Dr. Hyde* was a monster. Lions and tigers and bears are not monsters; *Godzilla* and *King Kong* are. A monster is a projection, an imaginary exaggeration of a known danger, that takes physical, conscious (sometimes intelligent) form. "Real" monsters exist only in

fiction—and mostly in science-fiction or fantasy.

From the sci-fi writer's point of view, a monster is a literary device, something that creates conflict, suspense and terror—an obstacle to pit heroes against. In theory, the more terrifying the monster, the more heroic the character who defeats it.

But usually, a monster is not a complex foe. Most monster flicks—e.g. — "Godzilla," "Mothra," "The Thing," "War of the Worlds," "King Kong"—are

essentially the same, dramatically, as disaster movies. The monster is handled as people would handle an earthquake, a burning skyscraper, or an exploding dirigible.

This is not true of "Star Trek" monster stories.

In the very first episode, "The Man Trap," *Dr. McCoy* rediscovers his given-up-for-dead fiancée—then learns she's really an alien making him hallucinate, who must kill by draining human bodies of salt in order to survive. But the payoff came not when the thing was electrocuted on high-tension wires or doused with acid or A-bombed to smithereens, but when *McCoy* learned that he should have used his head rather than his heart and destroyed the image of his love which he knew to be a fraud. The monster, once faced honestly, was easy to vanquish. Self-delusion was more of a monster than the salt-sucking alien.

The *Gorn*, Kirk's adversary in a battle-of-wits struggle to the death—in "Arena."



Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner—*Mr. Spock* and *Captain Kirk* of *Star Trek*.



In another early episode, "Where No Man Has Gone Before," the monster was an imaginary exaggeration of a very common human fear: fear of the man who knows vastly more than others. *Gary Mitchell* gained superhuman mental powers and sought to rule the universe. *Kirk*, heretofore *Gary's* best friend, watched the powers develop, watched *Gary's* character change . . . and still did nothing to stop *Gary* before he became almost literally a god. Ignoring *Spock's* advice to kill *Gary*, *Kirk* reasoned: yes, *Gary* knows and can do more than any man alive, and he could be dangerous; but if we can trust him, just think how much we might learn!

In "Metamorphosis," a glowing cloud abducts the shuttlecraft and carries *Kirk*, *Spock*, *McCoy* and an ailing ambassadress to a planet where they can never be found, and maroons them there. This all-powerful cloud of intelligent energy, a monster according to most definitions, has kept a man alive on a barren planet for a



As she's dying, her powers of illusion are gone and *McCoy's* beautiful fiancée shows her true nature. From "The Man Trap."

hundred years and has fallen in love with him. The cloud has imprisoned our heroes so they can keep her man from dying of loneliness. *Kirk* finds he can reason with the cloud—because she loves. And a strong appeal for acceptance of any kind of unconventional love relationship becomes the theme.

The miners, in "Devil in the Dark," are being brutally murdered by a silicone creature who can pass through solid rock as easily as we move through the air. Through the use of the famous *Vulcan* mind-meld, *Spock* learns that the creature is protecting a brood of eggs from thoughtless men who, unknowingly, are destroying them. The climax is that moment of understanding; the resolution is a trade agreement with the creature and her race of highly efficient tunnel-makers.

One of the most conventional "Star Trek" monsters was the *Gorn*, in "Arena." The lizard-like hideous humanoid was *Kirk's* adversary in a battle of wits to save the Federation. But the unusual situation had *Kirk* and the *Gorn* equally matched. *Kirk* was faster; the *Gorn* was stronger; and their mental resources were equivalent. (The conventional appearance of the *Gorn* might merely have been a matter of economics. In the original Fredric Brown story, the *Gorn* was a red sphere with retractable tentacles and no visible means of sensing or locomotion. That sphere, to be convincing, would have cost a small fortune to construct!)

Another at-first-glance conventional monster was the *Mugato* of "A Private Little War." But it was just a white gorilla with poisonous fangs—a nuisance more than a calamity. And it had nothing to do with the main point of the story. (Well, even "Star Trek" got too loose in



Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy, and Lieutenant Uhura (William Shatner, DeForest Kelley, and Nichelle Nichols) deal with an emergency aboard the Enterprise.




Gene Roddenberry, creator and philosophical guide of *Star Trek* and of its unusual position on the nature of monsters.

its story development occasionally. The *Mugato* is reminiscent of the mutant in "This Island Earth," as far as its connection to the story is concerned.)

A great many of "Star Trek's" monsters were microscopic: viruses, spores, mutant and deadly disease germs. These kept McCoy's research computers busy and gave us stories of biological science-fiction.

"Star Trek's" most inventive monster was the space amoeba in "The Immunity Syndrome." It was a breathtakingly beautiful one-celled behemoth which the Enterprise and the shuttlecraft entered—as much out of intellectual curiosity as anything else.



Spock grimaces at the pain of first contact with the alien mind of the silicone *Horta*—in “Devil in the Dark.”

Then there were the mechanical monsters—androids (*Ruk* in “What Are Little Girls Made Of?” for example), “The Doomsday Machine,” “The Changeling,” and other minor mechanisms.

There were monsters of pure mental energy—the globes containing essences of three superior intellects, in “Return to Tomorrow;” the *Providers* of “The Gamesters of Triskellion”; the swirl of hostile energy in “The Lights of Zetar.”

There were the ghostly monsters, like *Gorgan* in “And the Children Shall Lead,” and the puppet-master-like slugs of “Operation Annihilate.”

But these imaginative flights of fancy never took over the show. The monsters were there

merely to focus the action around some very human problem or attribute.

Gene Roddenberry, creator of “Star Trek,” has said that the show offered him an opportunity to express his own philosophy of life in story terms. Then what must be his attitude toward the “monsters” of life?

Judging from his “Star Trek” creatures, he must consider it true that there *are* monsters that we can face in daily life, but they are usually not very big, generally not as powerful as they seem, and no match for human intelligence.

But Roddenberry is also telling us that more often than not the thing we fear is not a monster at all, but merely some force we do not yet understand. When under-

standing comes, there is no longer any cause for fear.

Monsters, to Roddenberry, are not one-man wars to be obliterated; nor are they insects to be squashed. They are products of nature that can be studied, deciphered, and outwitted.

The real dangers on “Star Trek” come not from monsters but from men. Roddenberry believes in villains and heroes (realistic, fallible, human heroes), and he believes that a man can choose which he wishes to be—and even that he can have the ability to change if he decides he’s made the wrong choice.

We’re told, for instance, that *Vulcans* and *Romulans* have a common ancestry. It’s choice and philosophy that makes heroes of

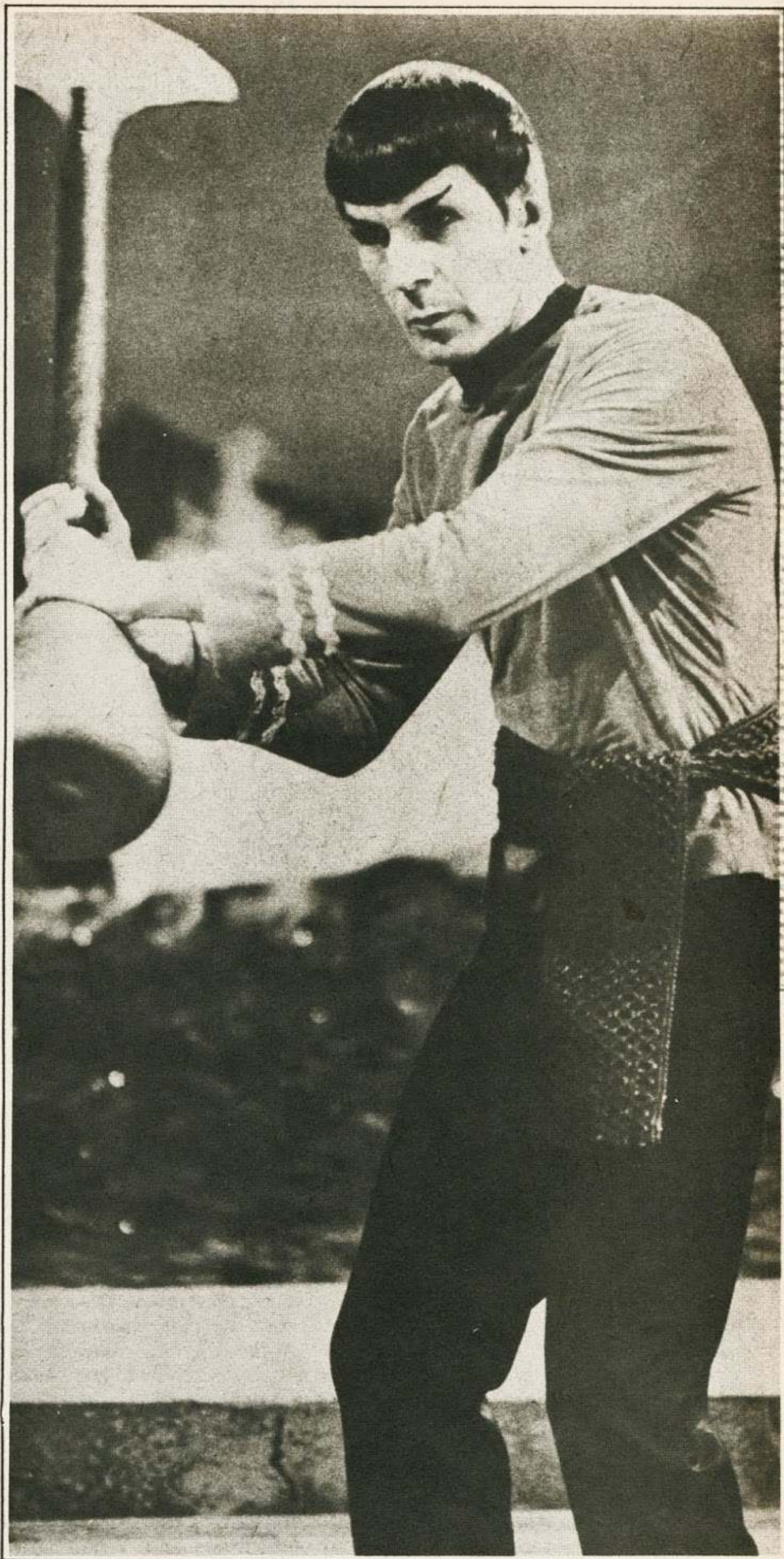
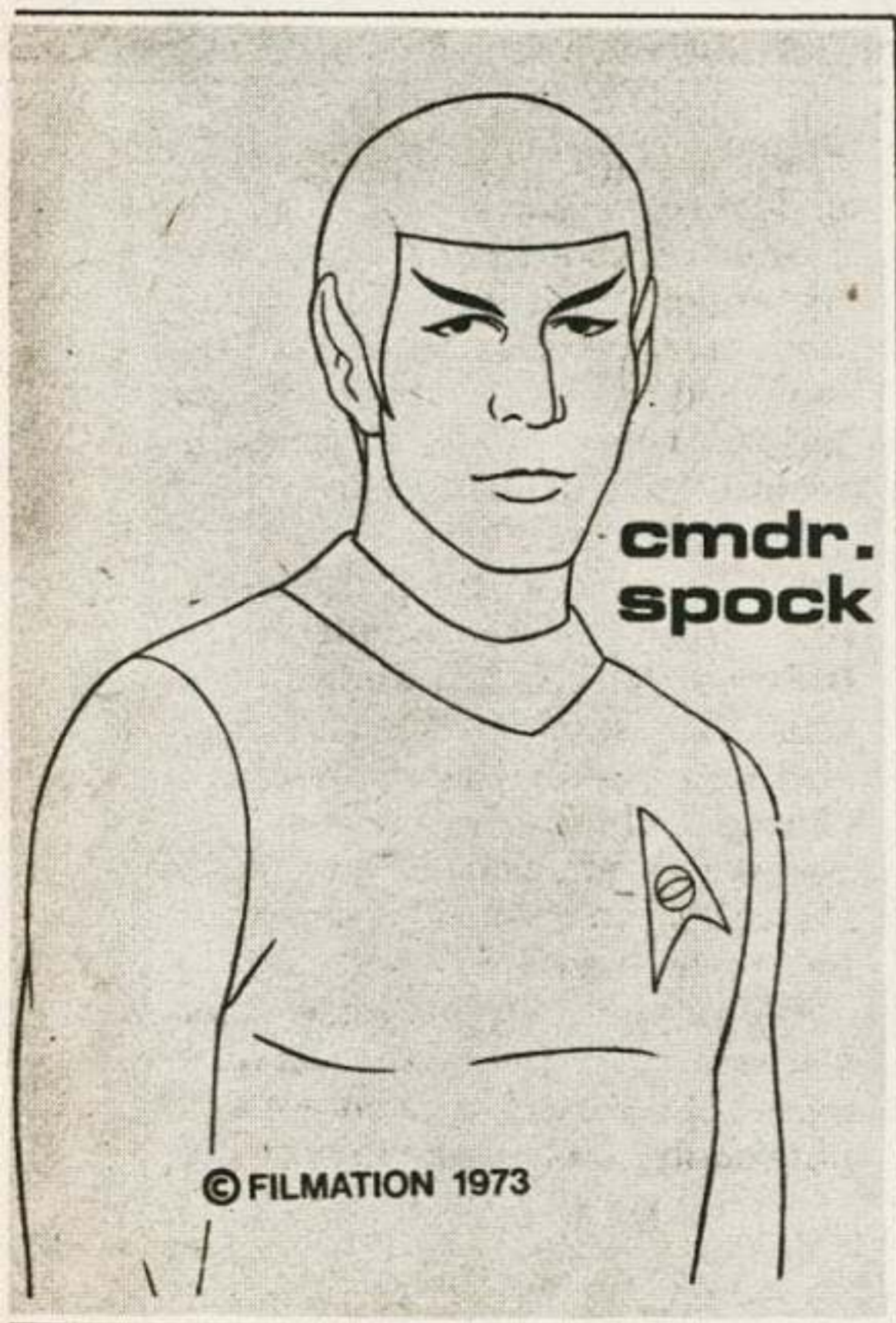
the most *Vulcan Vulcans* and villains of the most *Romulan Romulans*.

(Aliens, incidentally, are not monsters on "Star Trek," as long as they behave just as humans can and they look alien only because of the accident of being born halfway across the galaxy. "Star Trek" was always adamantly anti-prejudice.)

Roddenberry was plagued, toward the end of "Star Trek" filming, by the network's clamoring for more and fiercer monsters. He fought, as he did on other issues, to retain "Star Trek's" unique attitude toward monsters.

He's still fighting. In a recent interview he told of his battle for *Genesis II*, a proposed series that was shown as a pilot (two pilots, in fact; the other was called *Planet Earth*) and then never seen again. He said that the network was awed by the success of the

Spock, as he appears in the NBC animated version of "Star Trek."



Leonard Nimoy in "Amok Time," an episode from "Star Trek."

Planet of the Apes movies. "The public wants apes!" they assumed; and they asked Roddenberry to add apes to *Genesis II*. He wouldn't. And the series did not sell.

If you've watched a goodly number of episodes (and who hasn't?) you have probably deduced another of Roddenberry's philosophical tenets: reasonable patriotism. He believes in America's best qualities and believes they will prevail. He's a student of American

History. Oddly, this might also have influenced his attitude toward monsters and aliens. (Remember the American Indian culture of "The Paradise Syndrome"?)

In "The Making of Star Trek" (a Ballantine book by Roddenberry and Stephen Whitfield), Roddenberry says: "We hope we are helping to form the concept that . . . future interplanetary space travel is not 'wild fiction.' It will be as important to mankind tomorrow as the discovery of America was in its day. . . . Later, the colonists developed new vitality and new ideas which helped change mankind's whole direction. I only hope we'll be wiser when we meet the 'Aztecs'

or 'Mayans' of another planet. In the infinite possibilities 'out there,' if we act like savages, we may find someone quite capable of treating us as savages."

How were the "Star Trek" monsters invented? They were derived from the philosophy guiding the themes and premises of the stories. And that philosophy is largely the personal expression of Gene Roddenberry.

What is a "Star Trek" monster? An unknown phenomenon of nature to be grasped by probing intelligent scientists.

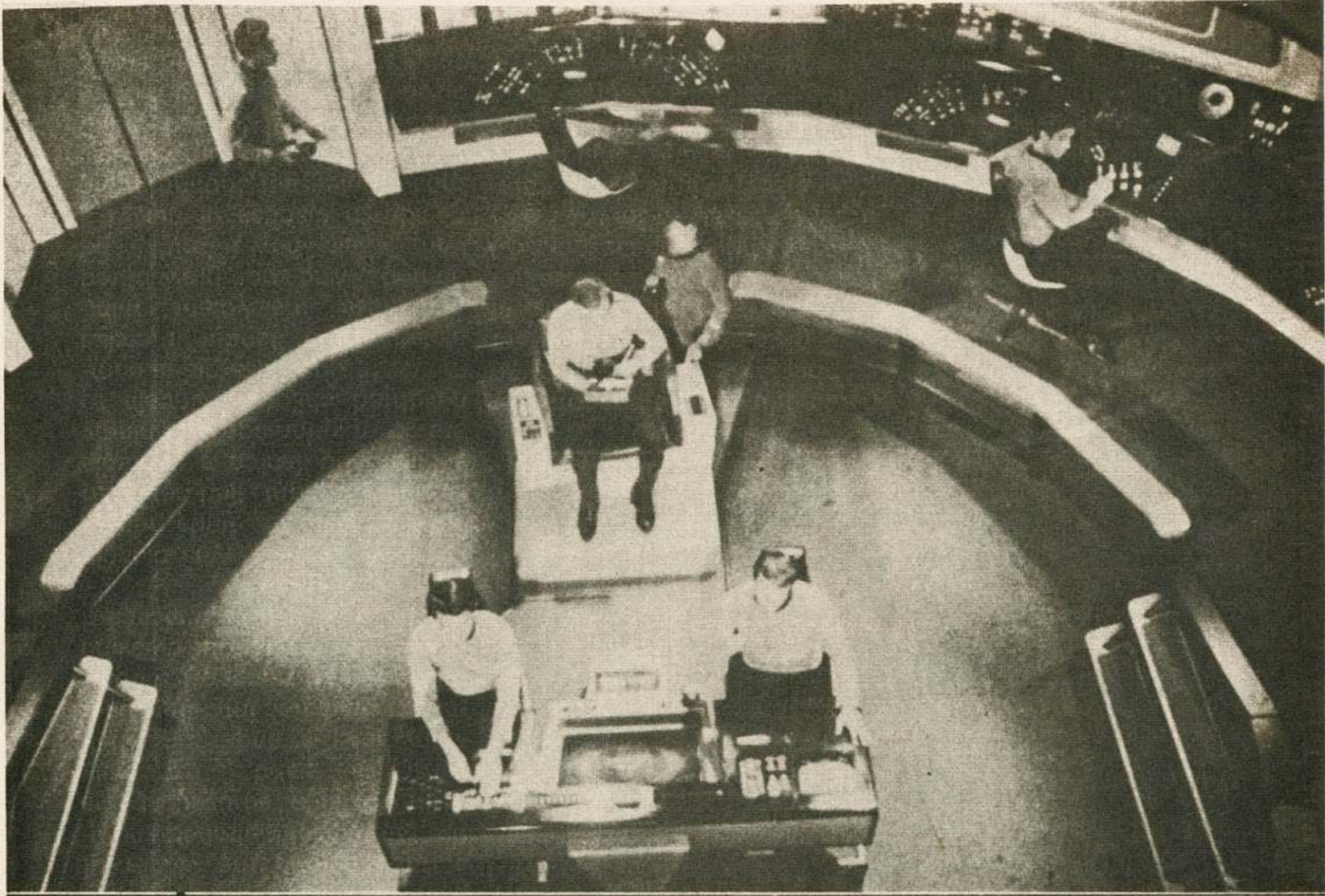
Where are the real monsters of "Star Trek?"

In the mind.

—DAVID HOUSTON

The deadly but manageable *Mugato* of "A Private Little War."





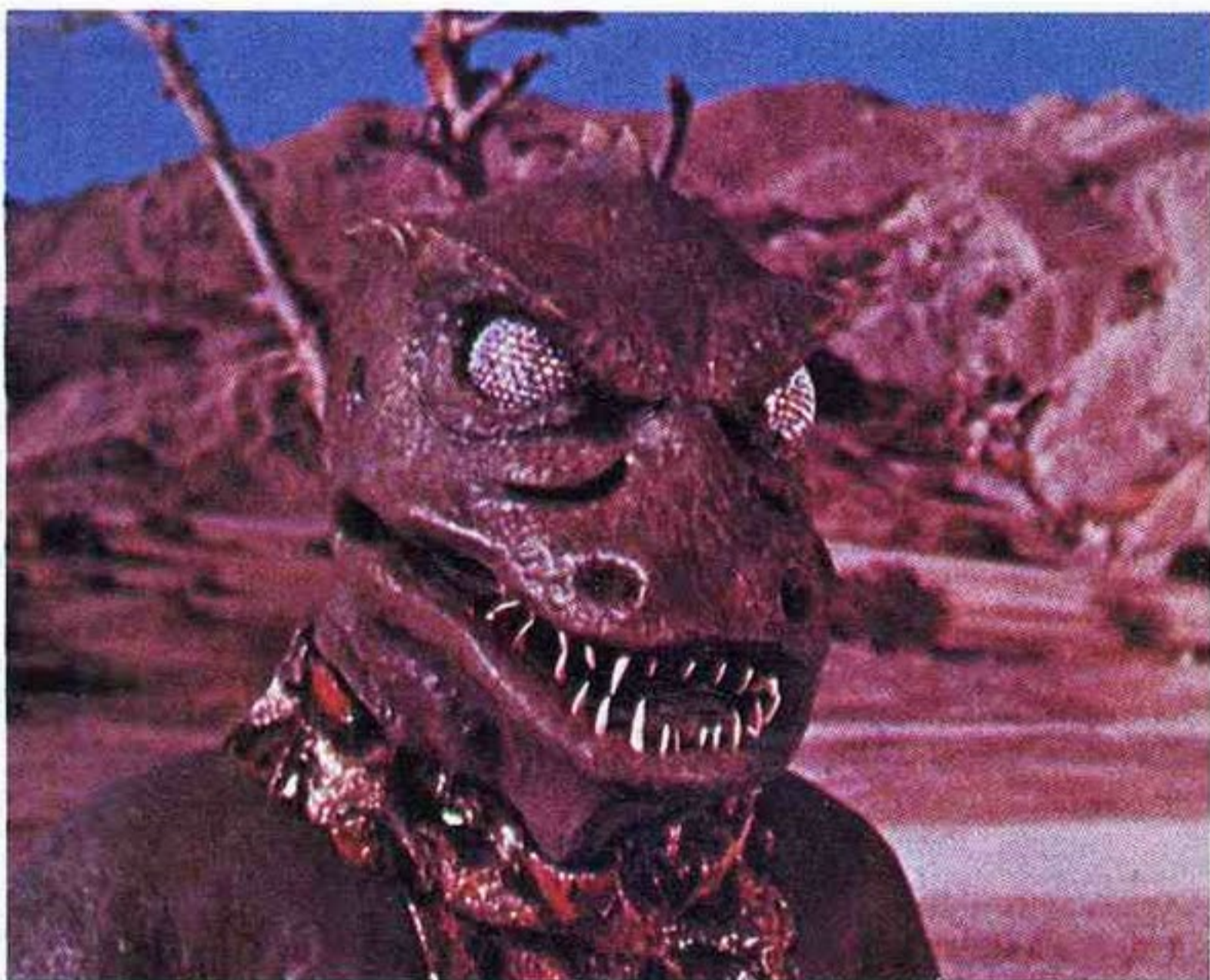
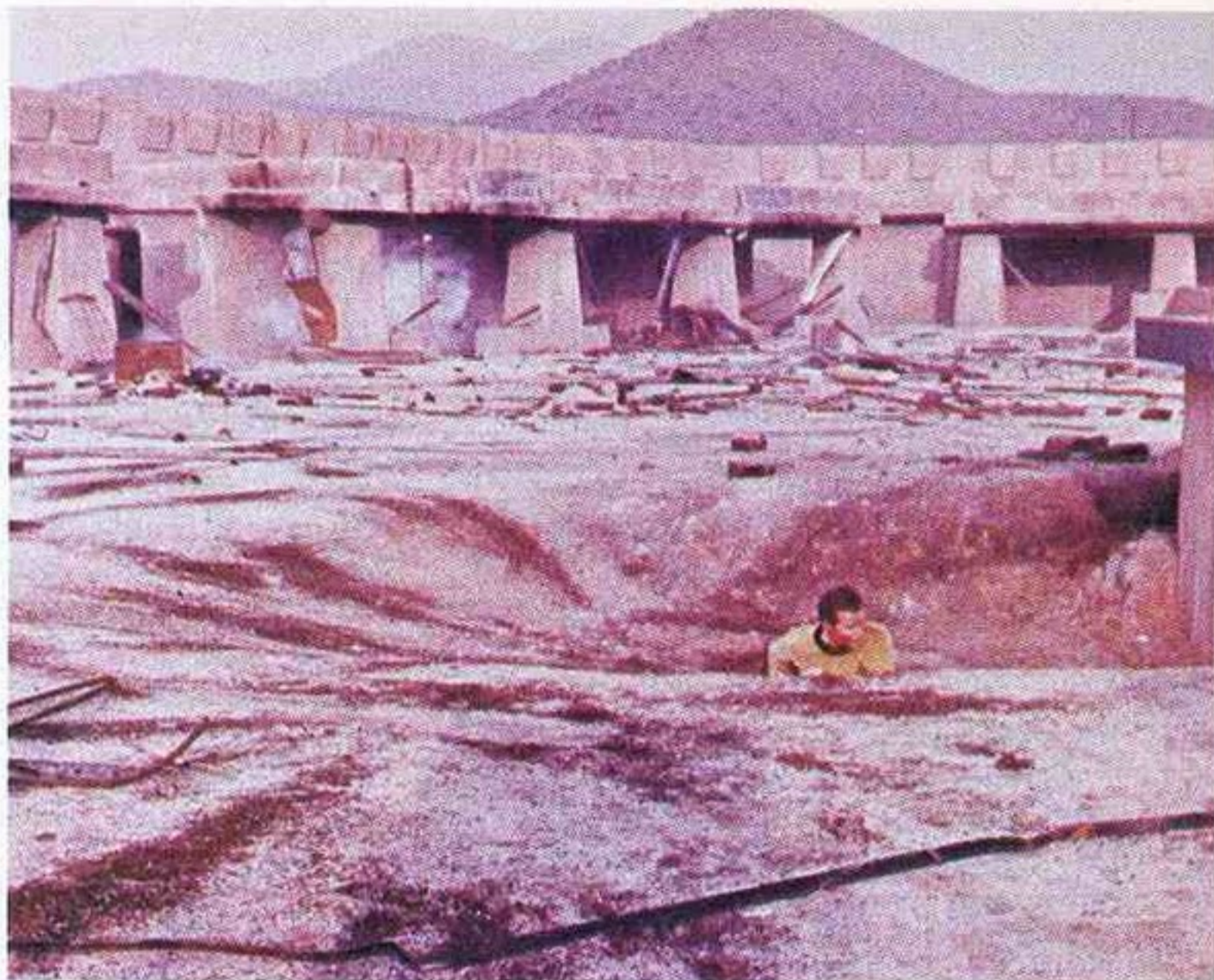
The bridge of the Starship Enterprise: "Red alert . . . red alert . . . there is an intruder aboard . . . extremely dangerous . . . phasers set to kill . . ."

Gene Roddenberry, affectionately dubbed "The Great Bird of the Galaxy" by many fans, is the only producer-writer in TV history to have a fan club of his own, The Gene Roddenberry Appreciation Society. He's seen here at his home in Los Angeles—on a mountaintop overlooking the city and the sea.

STAR TREK

Captain Kirk and the Gorn

The screen credit reads: "By Gene L. Coon from a story by Fredric Brown," and the teleplay is just that: an amalgam of the ideas of two men in the creation of a single work of art, *Star Trek's* "Arena." The framework here is Brown's: two forces on the brink of intergalactic annihilation, an interfering alien intelligence, the opportunity to solve the conflict in a single personal duel. The story's flesh and voice are Coon's: the characterization (within limits) of James T. Kirk, the slimy Gorn, the desert terrain, the specific tools and methods of attack, and the final message. The mentality of the script is Gene Coon's; the soul is Fred Brown's.

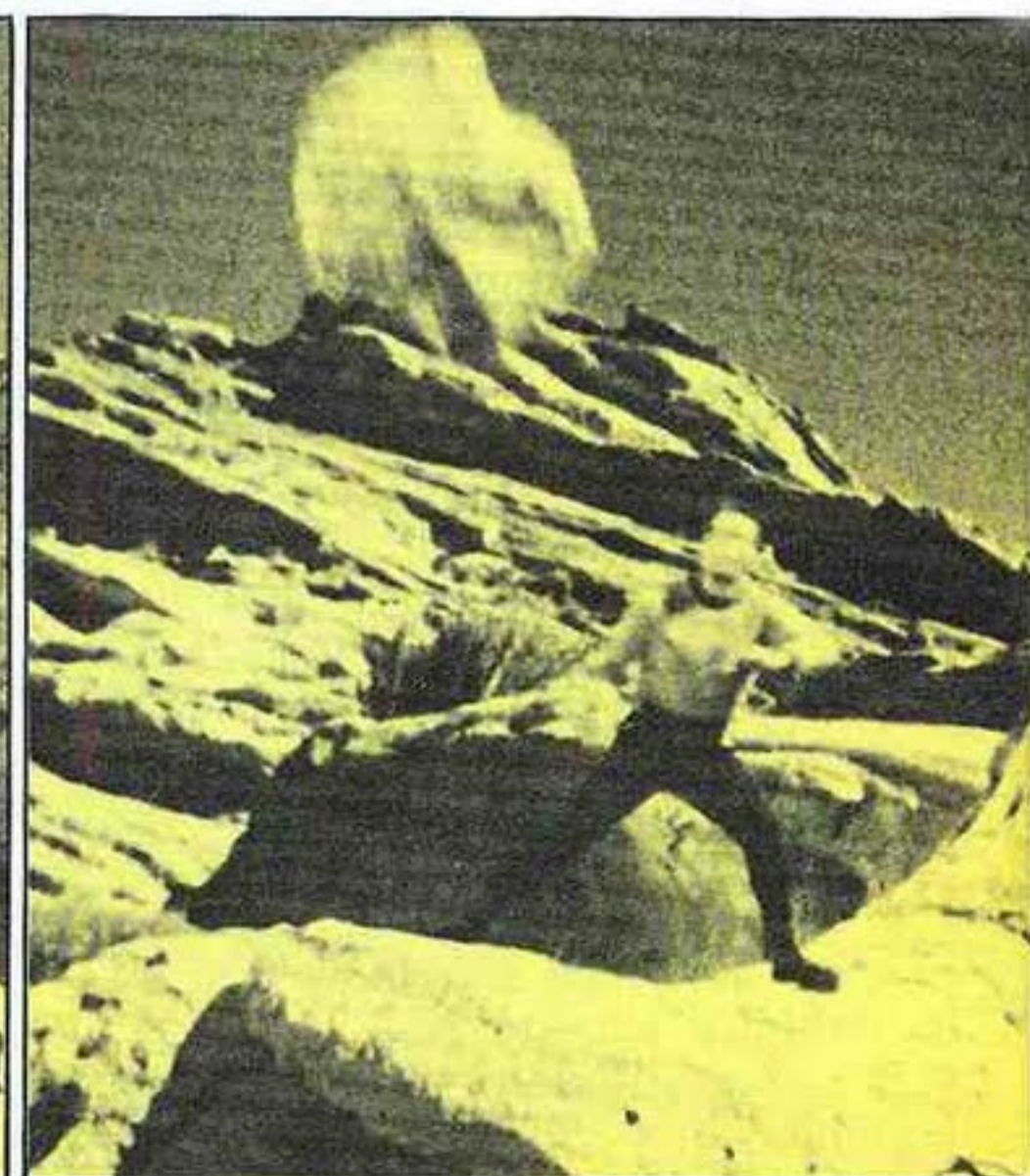
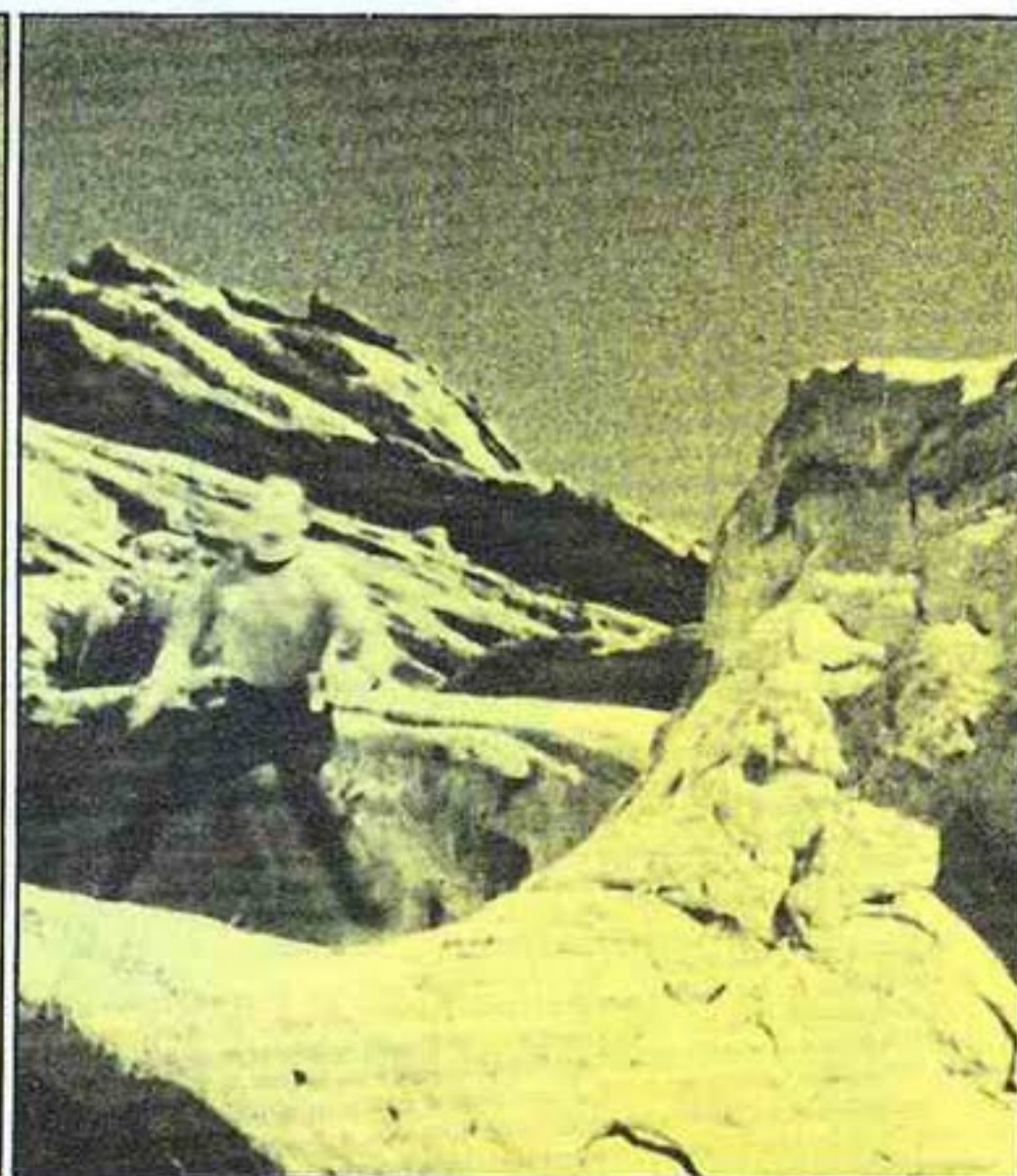


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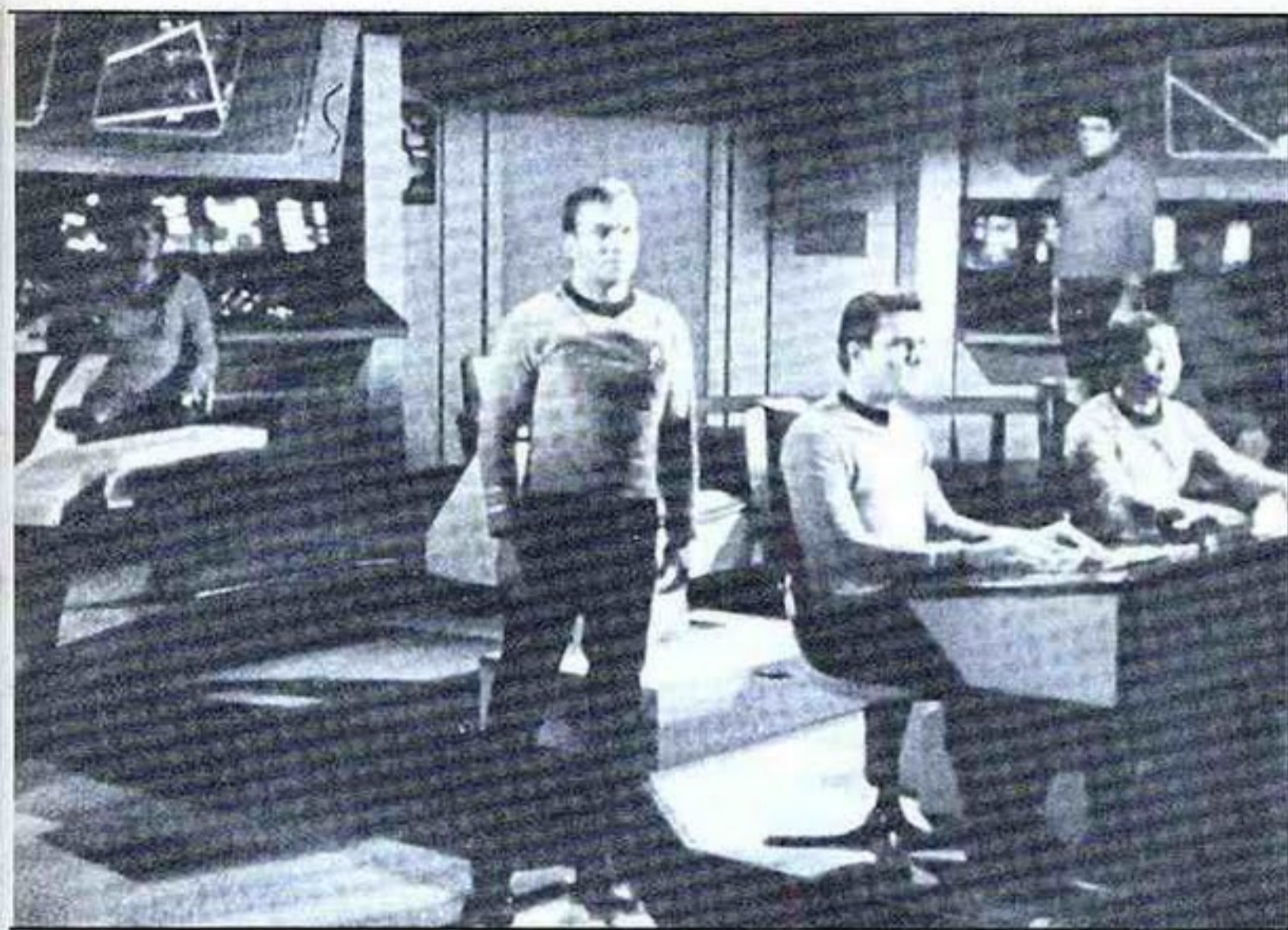
Photos: Paramount Pictures



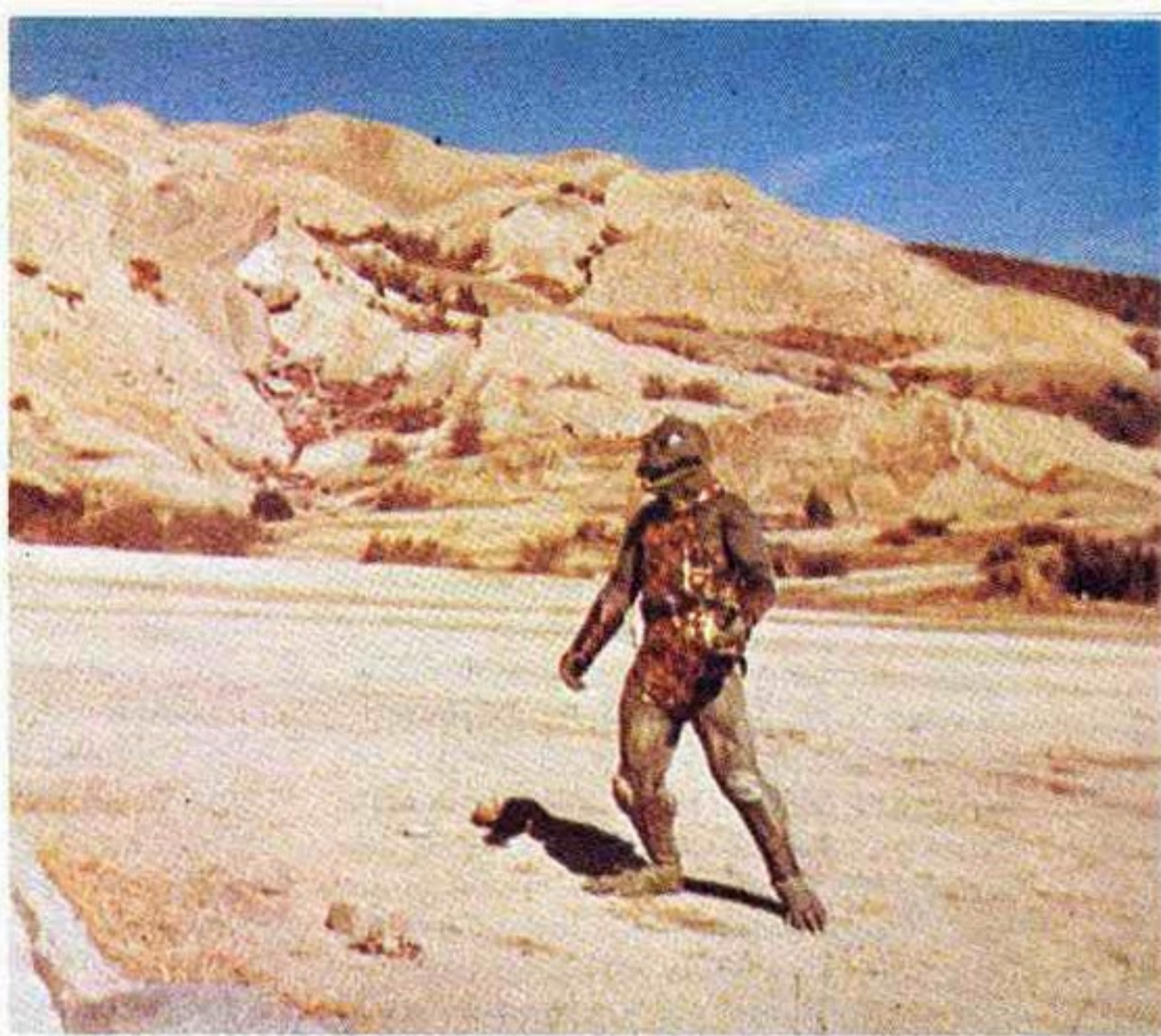
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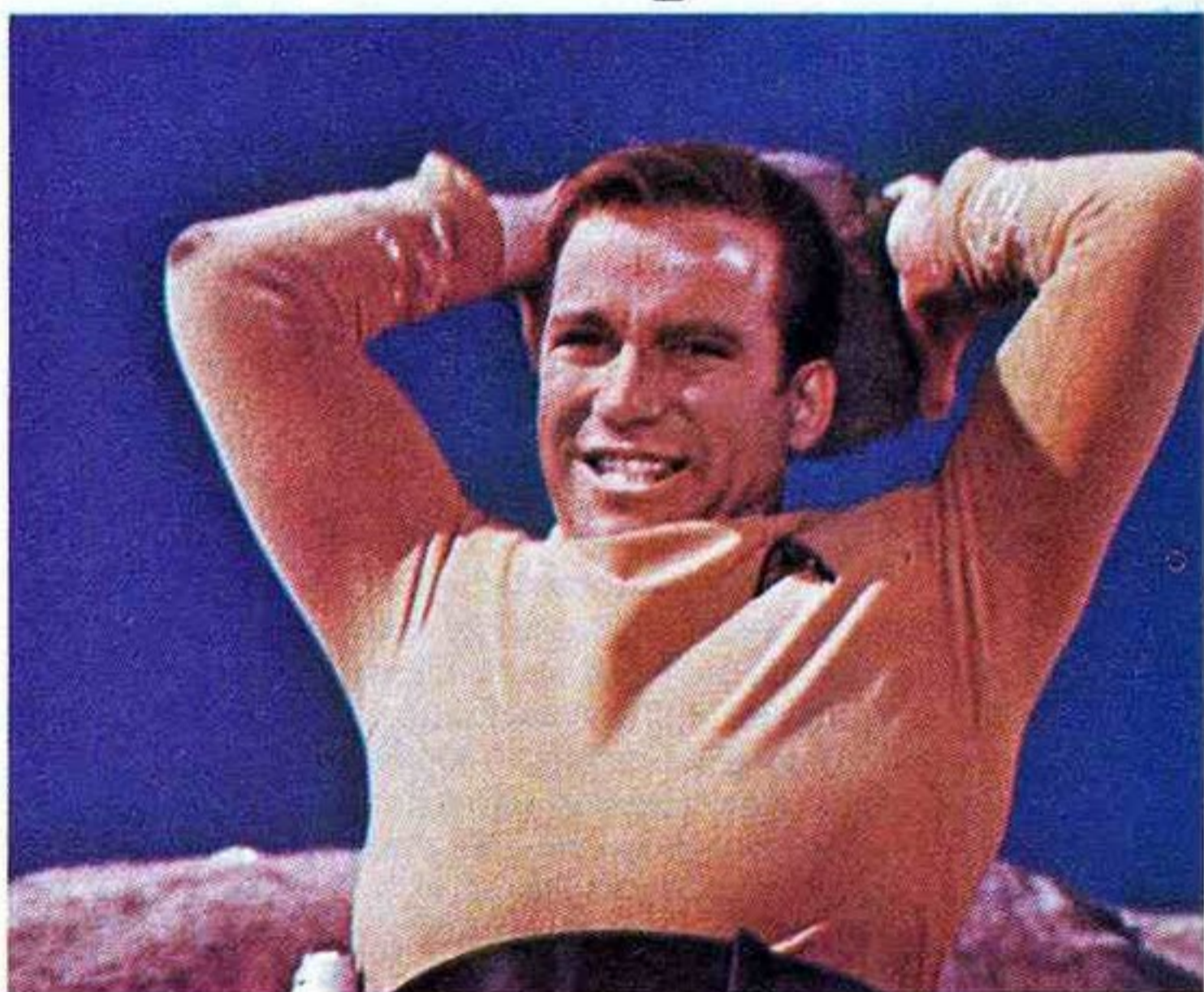


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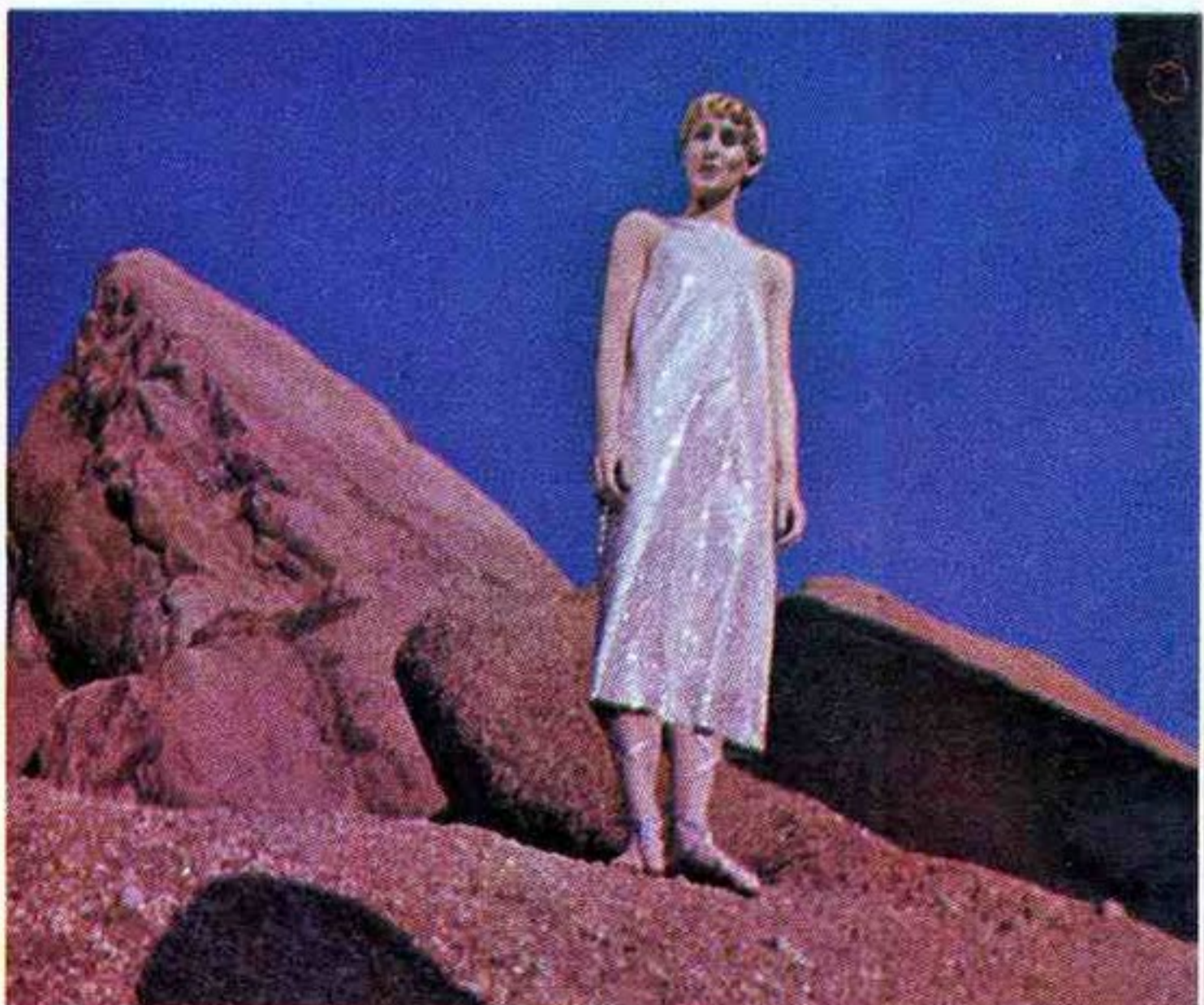
- 1 Kirk confronts an unseen enemy on the surface of a supposedly peaceful planet. It becomes clear that the enemy weapons are a match for the Federation's.
- 2 In a second, Kirk will be abducted from the bridge.
- 3 Kirk finds himself stripped of defenses and alone on a desert planet facing the enemy's representative.
- 4 The crew on the Enterprise, even though light years away from where the duel is to take place, are empowered to watch on the viewscreen. Spock's in charge.
- 5 The hideous Gorn is much stronger than Kirk but more sluggish. The inventiveness of the two seems matched.
- 6 First Kirk tries the simplest weapon he can find.
- 7 The Gorn replies in kind, but with a much bigger rock.
- 8 After escaping the snare set for him by the Gorn, Kirk wins by propelling rough diamonds at his tough-skinned opponent from a "cannon" powered by crude gunpowder—fashioned out of local minerals and plants.
- 9 The Metron appears and declares Kirk the winner, because of Kirk's display of compassion when he refuses to kill his enemy once victory is assured for earth.



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