



The Guests of "Trek"



Photo: Courtesy Oliver Crawford

OLIVER CRAWFORD'S "LAST BATTLEFIELD"

While Oliver Crawford has written for numerous episodic television series, it is his forays into the world of science fiction that he has found most intriguing. That's because science fiction has allowed him to deal with issues usually considered taboo.

"It's not that I'm particularly a fan of the genre," he observes. "I never approach that kind of show from a science-fiction point-of-view. Everything that I've written—and I know this sounds both profound and corny at the same time—has come from the belief that the essence of a writer is to bring some illumination to the human condition. You try to make a statement about a universal truth, and it's the situation that counts. You can make it a Western, if it takes place a hundred years ago, or science fiction, if it takes place 500 years from now. The point is that the people in the story remain the same. At the same time, you must cater to what television is, so through the years, I've managed to blend the two."

Crawford admits that he is something of a survivor in Hollywood, having successfully rebounded from the days of McCarthyism and blacklisting of the 1950s.

"Two hundred writers were blacklisted from 1953 to 1957," Crawford explains. "Of them, only 10 percent were able to

He may not be a science-fiction fan, but Oliver Crawford confesses that "Star Trek did make an impact" on him.

recover their careers, and I was always grateful to be among them. People have often said, 'How could the blacklist happen?', but it's *amazing* what can happen: what form intolerance can take, as well as intimidation. I like to think that any situation you're involved with during the course of your life equips you to become a better person and, in my case, a better writer."

One such example is evident in Crawford's sole effort for *The Outer Limits*, titled "The Special One."

"After Russia launched Sputnik [and put men into space], John F. Kennedy said that America would have someone on the Moon in 10 years," he explains. "The government went around to all the schools in the country to try to pick the best and brightest for the space program. My son had been chosen out of his class, and was subject to special classes and all of that. I was very apprehensive because I didn't want Big Brother looming, but they said that they would study him as he got older to see how he shaped up. I was particularly proud that he had the kind of I.Q. that made him stand out.

"Ultimately, he dropped out of the program and never got into the final college phase, but in the meantime, I thought, 'Jesus, what if I took that situation, and instead of it being the United States Government looking for astronauts for the space program,' which was then in its infancy, 'it's somebody from another planet using the same method to train new leaders to take over the world for them. So, that's what I wrote, and it was a very personal story. I'm very proud of that piece of writing."

While he also scripted episodes for such Irwin Allen series as *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and *Land of the Giants*, they don't stir the same kind of memories.

"It's difficult now at this phase of my life," admits the 70-year-old Crawford, "to remember how I wrote so much material. I do remember that my kids used to wonder what the heck I was doing all that time, but when they started catching shows in reruns, they and their friends were suddenly impressed. The stories that I enjoy reading and writing deal with what's happening now. How can we best reflect it? Of course, with censorship and the fact that everything a TV

Having Lokai's (Lou Antonio) colors reversed on his arch-enemy "was a marvelous cinematic effect," says Crawford.

writer wrote was an appendage to a sales message, you had to find a common ground that wouldn't alienate sponsors, and still find a way of telling your stories. I tried to stay away from gimmickry, and I think my scripts for *Star Trek* fell into that line."

Crawford wrote a total of three scripts for *Star Trek*, working with both Gene Roddenberry and Fred Freiberger. His initial effort was "The Galileo Seven," rewritten by Shimon Wincelberg, in which an *Enterprise* shuttlecraft crashes on an alien world, and the crew is forced to struggle for survival in a hostile environment.

"I did the story and teleplay for that one," the writer details, "and then, as often happens, someone else was called in. They probably felt that I had run dry on the idea and came as far as I could, and they got Shimon to do a polish, just as I had done for other *Star Treks* and other shows.

"Most of my approach as a writer had been to look to old movies and say, 'Gee, this would make a good *Star Trek*, or a good Western, or a good detective story.' The foundation for 'The Galileo Seven' was actually an old [1939] motion picture called *Five Came Back*. That was about a plane crash in the Andes, and the survivors who have to deal with head-hunters over the next hill. I remembered it because it was such a dramatic gimmick, a very tight one.

"This is a way that you grab the producer's interest," he notes. "If it was a Western, when Westerns were popular, you would say, 'I can put *The Maltese Falcon* into a Western setting.' That's immediately intriguing. They say, 'You can't. How does it



Photo: NBC

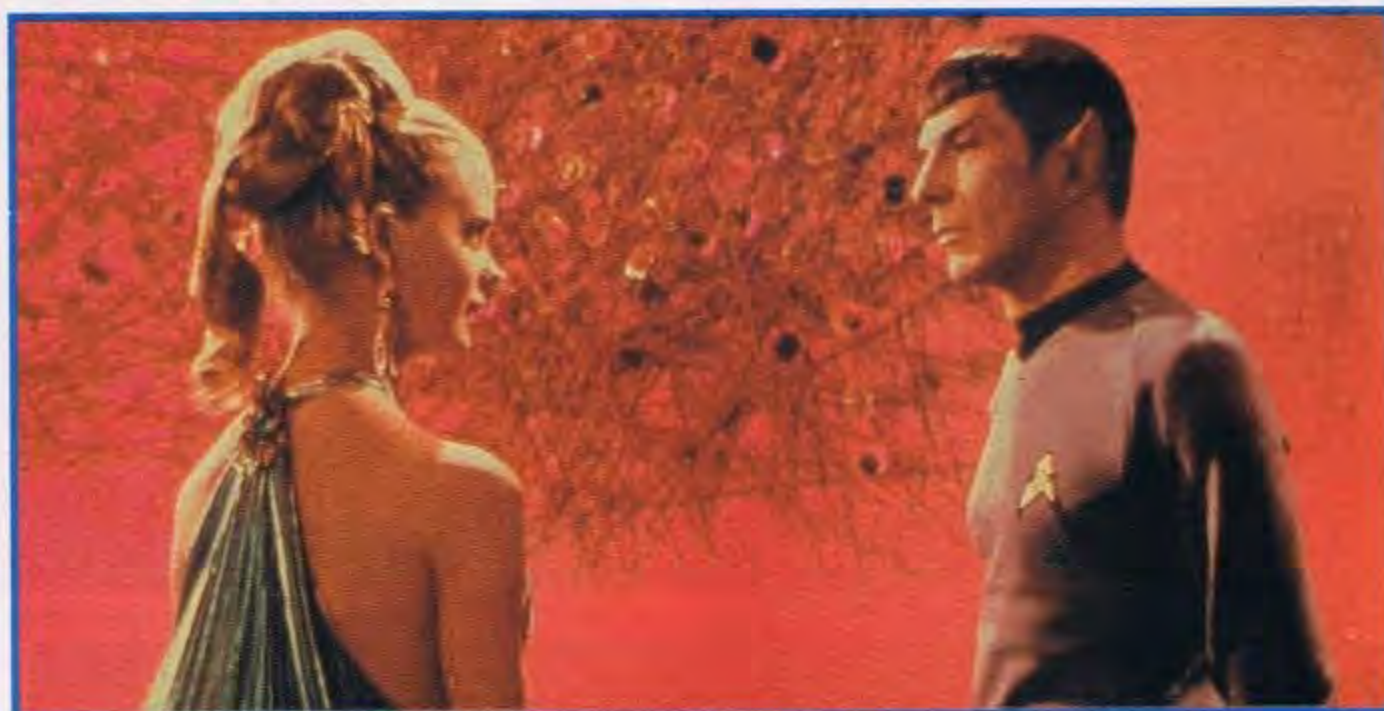


An old movie, not a mysterious quasar, was the real reason "The Galileo Seven" had to fight for their lives on Tarsus II.

fit into our format? You say, 'This old prospector finds some icon from a past civilization, now you send the forces in.' Because it's a remake of *The Maltese Falcon*, the producer wants to make it work. It's a springboard to get you in there and command their attention. I suppose it's like reading a book. If you aren't grabbed by the first 10 pages, sometimes you put the book down."

Next up was the third season episode "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield," in which two survivors of a racially motivated alien war battle to the death aboard the *Enterprise*. The source of their hatred for each other is that one is white on the left side of his face and black on the other, while his counterpart's colors are reversed.

"That was originally a Gene Coon story that was brought to me," Crawford relates. "It dealt with racial intolerance, and I thought it was a marvelous visual and



Spock's (Leonard Nimoy) meeting with Droxine (Diana Ewing) and "The Cloud Minders" went through three different writers before reaching the screen. "Television," Crawford notes, "is a collaborative medium."

cinematic effect. The whole point of the story was that color is only skin deep. How could any writer not respond to that? That fit right into today's scene, and I was very pleased with the episode."

"The Cloud Minders," which Crawford rewrote, is perhaps the source of more controversy than any other script written for the series. In a situation well documented in the pages of STARLOG (see issues #39-40), David Gerrold wrote the first draft teleplay, which third season producer Fred Freiberger didn't like. The script was handed to Crawford, who also turned in a draft which proved unsatisfactory to Freiberger. From there, Margaret Armen (STARLOG #125) did the final aired version.

"David Gerrold was a young writer, and his script kind of wandered all over," says Crawford. "I recall Freddy calling me up and saying, 'I want to put an old pro together with a young writer.' Writers are constantly wounded, but television is very much a collaborative medium. To get the happy circumstance where everything gels and everybody's talent enhances everybody

else's is tough to achieve, but worth it when you do. When people go off on tangents, you find that you don't have much of anything. I know very few writers who are happy with all of their work as produced, unless they're in a position of power and not too many of us are.

"I did think that 'The Cloud Minders' was right in line with the good work and thrust of the series," Crawford elaborates. "It was almost like a *Brave New World*. The key thing there was exploitation, and that's something we must deal with all the time."

While oblivious to the shift in the series' focus between the second and third seasons, Oliver Crawford believes that *Star Trek's* death on NBC was due to a tragic oversight on the network's part.

"I think that *Star Trek* did make an impact originally," he concludes, "it's just that NBC underestimated their audience and lived and died by the ratings system. The kids who ultimately became the *Trek* fans didn't control the sets. Their parents did. The generation that grew up on it did so when the series was in syndication, and that's what ultimately saved it. It had basic human story values. *Star Trek* was a series that tried to say something to the audience."

—Edward Gross



According to Crawford, the ancient riddle of racial intolerance posed by Bele (Frank Gorshin) still "fits into today's scene."



Realizing they were "dealing with morons," Spock (Nimoy) is forced to try a somewhat stronger argument on Bela Oxmyx (Anthony Caruso).

All Star Trek TV Photos: Copyright 1966, 1967, 1968 Paramount Pictures TV



For only "A Piece of the Action," how can Spock (Nimoy) and Kirk (William Shatner) go wrong letting this kid (Sheldon Collins) help them bust into Krako's joint?

JAMES KOMACK BETS ON "A PIECE OF THE ACTION"

One of Starfleet Command's most stringent rules is the Prime Directive, which forbids its members from interfering with the natural development of alien worlds. Despite this edict, there have occasionally been Starfleet officers who have "influenced" new societies, altering their way of life forever. The results are usually disastrous, though sometimes hilarious.

In the *Star Trek* episode "A Piece of the Action," the *Enterprise* is sent to Sigma Iotia II to study the nature of the sociological contamination left behind a hundred years earlier by the starship *Horizon*. What they find is a planet modeled after Roaring Twenties Chicago. Writer/director James Komack, who co-starred with Bill Bixby in *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* and is preparing a *Welcome Back, Kotter* TV reunion, recalls "A Piece of the Action" affectionately.

"In those days, I was a journeyman director in television," he says, "having done 77 *Sunset Strip*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Hennesey*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and so on. Gene Roddenberry wanted to do a comedy episode and I was a natural contender because I had done long form and was a comedy director. I had really enjoyed the show, read the script, made some adjustments and said, 'I would love to do this,' and I found myself on the starship *Enterprise*."

"Usually," Komack notes, "when you're a director working on episodic television, the actors mostly know their parts, who they are and what they do, and all you're doing is trying to find new ways for them to move around. The acting was already locked in because they had done it. This was fun because it was a comedy, and Bill Shatner loves to do comedy."

One problem the director *did not* have to deal with was the cast's refusing to do certain things because they weren't right for their roles.

"Usually, that comes about after they've formulated their characters," he explains. "When you come on a show, they say, 'I've been doing this show for three years. I would never say that.' You can't argue with the guy. In this episode, though, I could say, 'Hold it. You're down in the 20th century, pal. You're dealing with morons. You've never done that before, so therefore you *could* say this.' And they would buy it. But *not* in the spaceship. In the spaceship, they had it down, and it was so goddamned technical. We were talking about the ramifications of the polarization of some kind of thing in the atmosphere. I didn't know *what* they were talking about, but *they* did. They've got it all figured out."

"Something that *was* fun for me," elaborates Komack, "was having Spock and Kirk come down with this great intellect and intelligence that they possess, and having them deal with monkeys. These guys had an I.Q. of about room temperature. It was funny to convince the actor to play that, and then watch Kirk and Spock stare at them because they were just so ludicrous. That was great fun."

Trying to maintain *Star Trek's* future reality while combining it with the Chicago of the past was more complex, however.

"That *was* tough," he concurs, "remembering that these guys were from another time while we're trying to make a picture about the '20s. You constantly have to say that it has to be the '20s from everyone else's point-of-view, and 'future time' for Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner, and that did get a little bizarre. The joke going around them was that they had never seen a machine-gun fire before, they had never seen pool tables or cars. We would have to work out the jokes right then and there. You would have to say, 'Wait a minute. You've never seen that before. I've got to shoot something showing that.'"

Like most good comedy, a great deal of "A Piece of the Action" was improvised, particularly the Fizzbin card game played by Captain Kirk and a group of dim-witted gangsters.

"They just sat down and did it," Komack laughs. "Shatner really thought of this idea, and I embellished it. Since I was a writer, it was very easy to add the corrective to get us onto the next beat."

Still, the shooting moved a bit slower than Komack had expected, due to some of the episode's physical action.

"The gangster scenes in the room were all



On a planet where anyone could "hit" anybody anywhere, the Federation's boys (DeForest Kelley, Shatner, Nimoy) found even they weren't untouchable.

fine," he explains. "The exterior stuff with the cars going by, bullets going off and them hitting the ground, and making some kind of reality out of a backlot, was a little more difficult. I had done action before where the company was more oriented to do that kind of work, but *Star Trek* wasn't really prepared for it. They weren't used to it, and so it was a little slower for me."

While proud of the fact that the episode is so highly regarded by fans, Komack points out that he isn't as fond of his old directorial style.

"I've progressed so much since then and so has the business," he admits sheepishly. "I look back at much of my work and think that it's not that good, that I could have done much better. As a writer, though, I sometimes find scripts of mine that really hold up. The material transcends the time. But as a director, I find myself constantly progressing in terms of fluidity both in the camera and in the design of shots. Not with the actors, because I'm pretty good with them, having been an actor myself. I'm fascinated with directing and photography, and I just look at some of the shots and find them to be so pedestrian. I did one shot over the pool table [in "A Piece of the Action"] and it was such a big deal to me; I had never seen anyone shoot down on a pool table. Today, *everyone* does it."

Conversely, he believes that the *Star Trek* phenomenon itself is something that has also improved with age.

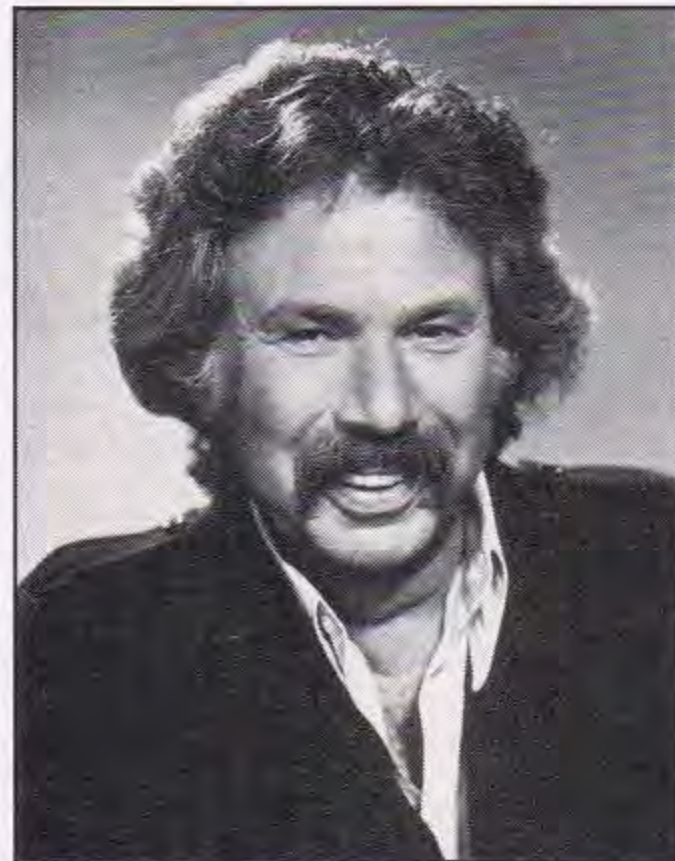


Photo: Courtesy James Komack

"I really enjoyed *Star Trek*," says James Komack. "It's a classic form of fantasy."

"It's a classic form of fantasy, of illusion that you can *only* create on film," James Komack enthuses. "You can take yourself out of your current time and enjoy a mythical place, a mythical time and believe that life is beautiful. Because *they* were beautiful. They had enemies like we have enemies, but they had different ways of dealing with them. Goodness and the truth always prevailed. *Star Trek* has survived for the same reason that *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Christmas stories have survived for all these years. It's a wonderful escape."

—Edward Gross