

TEENS and TWENTIES

The Legacy of Gene Roddenberry

by Shazaad Ahmed



Space: The Final Frontier — Even on The Silver Screen

IN 1964, when things like integration and bilingual education were sinking up the country, the multi-racial, multi-cultural, inter-planetary crew of the Starship Enterprise were working, and living together as they explored the uncharted frontiers of space. And today, 30 years, 3 series, and 7 motion pictures later, STAR TREK continues exploring the final frontier. May they all live long and prosper.

With these words, actor Jimmy Smits went on to present an honorary award to the cast, crew and creators of Gene Roddenberry's 30-year old legacy at this year's Screen Actor's Guild Awards.

The recognition not only served to legitimize the STAR TREK phenomenon further, but also took the entire science fiction genre a step towards attaining its share of respectability.

What started out as a B-Movie style television series in the mid-sixties, with weak (and often laughable) story-lines, accompanied by amateur special effects, then at its rudimentary stage, struck the core of the SCI-FI medium and triggered off a phenomenon that has lasted for 30 years with no end in sight.

The late Gene Roddenberry's successors have achieved the task of tapping into the formula that has made STAR TREK what it is today. It transcends way beyond entertainment, the desire for which is instigated by our attraction to the basic elements of science fiction, leaving its distinct mark on every culture, including our own.

I got on a cab in New York City, and the cab driver said to me that STAR TREK was the favourite show at his village in Bangladesh.

Actor Patrick Stewart, on a BBC interview, said:

STAR TREK has indeed evolved into a cultural phenomenon. Witness the facts. In 1976, long after the cancellation of the original television series, more than 400,000 letters were sent to Washington DC urging that NASA name the first of its experimental space shuttles after the futuristic Starship from the TV show. Hence, the Space Shuttle Enterprise came into existence.

Furthermore, STAR TREK initially attained its popularity at the wake of the civil rights movement and the inclusion of a multi-racial cast was noticed by none other than Martin Luther King Jr. As he once said to actress Nichelle Nichols, her portrayal had altered the face of television forever, in terms of the depiction of African-Americans in the media.

After the cancellation of the original show, STAR TREK first made its debut on the silver screen with STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE. Reuniting the cast members from the original television series and introducing them to the motion picture medium liberated Roddenberry's characters from the confinements of the small screen, gave them a new generation of audience and consequently broadened their appeal. However in terms of characterization and plot, the \$35 million movie had little to

offer. But its strength lies in recognizing the fact that it opened the doorway for the future motion pictures, two of which deserve to go down in SCI-FI movie history as cinematic masterpieces. STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN released three years later was a step towards attaining cinematic perfection, reviving actor Ricardo Montalban's role as Khan from the 'Space Speed' episode of the original TV show. But the brilliance of the STAR TREK motion pictures came full circle with the 1984

release of THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK, where the crew of the Enterprise go on a renegade mission to learn the truth about Spock's death. And as one critic aptly stated, "Finding out may be one of the most entertaining things you do in front of the movie screen. However the excellence of STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME (1986) (where the crew of the enterprise journeys back to earth on a Klingon Bird of Prey only to witness another tragedy in making), has yet to be surpassed.

As the story follows, the transmissions from an alien probe initiates the break down of the Earth's atmosphere, and unless the probe's signals are answered by a particular form of life, extinct since the 23rd century, the atmospheric surrounding of the planet will ultimately be destroyed. Hence Captain Kirk leads his crew back in time in an attempt to retrieve a pair of mammals that can answer the probe's transmission and restore the earth's atmosphere. "The Voyage Home" is yet another example as to how an

odd-ball story-line can be made workable through the brilliant characterization of the movies key figures; a task that can only be undertaken and achieved by the characters of STAR TREK.

In 1989, backed by Gene Roddenberry, Paramount Pictures undoubtedly made it's most successful move yet by releasing a new television series, the first since the original show was cancelled. Star Trek: The Next Generation surpassed all expectations and much of it's success is owed to the fact that it's creators once again developed a series, driven not by it's special effects, but more by the individual and distinct characterization of it's key figures.

Hence we have the first officer torn between his dedication to his superior, yet driven by his ambitions to one day captain his own Starship. The android Lt. commander and his incessant attempts to emulate the human ways of life. The Klingon Security officer, dedicated to his duties, but alienated from his human counterparts. And at the centre of it all stood the new captain of the Enterprise, who probably took five minutes of over shadow captain Kirk with his firm dignity and grace. Inspired by the success of THE NEXT GENERATION, in 1993 Paramount released a second television series entitled STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE. A menagerie of intergalactic aliens ranging from Cardassians and Klingons to Romulans and Bajorans, the new series was unique in the sense that aside from being the first STAR TREK spin-off to not feature the Enterprise, the show is based entirely on a space station as opposed to the more familiar star ships.

This shift in the format was integral when it came to maintaining the versatility and vibrancy of the STAR TREK saga since in 1994, Paramount released a third television series to bear the names of Gene Roddenberry and STAR TREK. STAR TREK: VOYAGER follows the adventures of a group of explorers from the Starship USS VOYAGER. The show proved that the demand for anything with the name STAR TREK attached to it was phenomenal as the show went into syndication in the US almost immediately after it debut.

As for the motion pictures, after two back-to-back disappointments in terms of critical reviews and box office gross (THE FINAL FRONTIER in 1989, and THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY, 1991), Paramount made it's come-back last summer with the release of STAR TREK: GENERATIONS. By formulating a complex, yet excellent script where members of the original cast are integrated with the cast and crew of the new Starship Enterprise is yet another demonstration of Paramount's prudent business acumen. Passing the torch, so as to speak, from the older characters to the newer cast members invariably led to the possibility of developing a new set of motion pictures devoid of the original figures (whose constant over exposure had begun to obstruct the success of the movies), giving STAR TREK fans — Trekkies if you like — the opportunity to experience a whole new format.

Back to the Future A History of Science Fiction

by Nausher Rahman

SCIENCE Fiction, or sci-fi as it is known to Generation Xers, has always been about going back to the future. Every time you pick up a sci-fi book you are transported in a time-space continuum, more usually back to where the last one left off. From space odysseys and star treks to technological advances yet to come, from androids and robots to star wars, every novel or story is a glimpse into past fantasies, and a possible future. Yet sci-fi has been around for much longer than many would realize.

It started in 1818 with the classic Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The book is recognized as the earliest and yet one of the finest pieces of science fiction. It has one of the most timeless and recurring plots in sci-fi, that of the mad doctor defying nature, and thus creating havoc. Then in the mid 1800s came several so called sci-fi books which in reality were flights of fantasy under the guise of science fiction. Among them, *A Journey To The Center Of The Earth* (1864) and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* (1869-70) by Jules Verne were both instant successes and early indicators of the growing popularity of science fiction. This was further evident with the enormous popularity of H G Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The War Of The Worlds* (1898), both of which are still in print to this day, a hundred years later.

The pulp-era, or pop culture, of science fiction can be traced back to the founding of three magazines at the turn of the century. *Argosy* (founded 1882) printed the works of James Branch Cabell and was the first to offer the works of long time sci-fi writer Murray Leinster. *The All-Story* (founded 1914) discovered, among others, authors such as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* started by reprinting Wells and Verne, but eventually developed a group of writers whose works ultimately became the definition of early science fiction short stories. The amazing success of this magazine in the 1920s in America indicated the growing audience of this literature. An important rival magazine, *Astounding Stories* (later *Astounding Science Fiction*) was founded in 1930. In 37 its editorship was taken up by John W. Campbell, a sci-fi writer himself, and a crusader in the field, till his death in 1971. His vision of sci-fi was that of a fiction which would reflect the effects of technology on society, culture and individuals. He expected his writers to produce works comparable to any other field of literature. It was under his mantle that a fresh generation of writers emerged, most of whom had grown up with *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction*. Among the prominent novelists of this epoch are, the legendary Isaac Asimov, L Sprague de Camp, Robert A Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon and A E Van Vogt. They

public outcry against the horrifying use of nuclear weapons, something it had predicted years earlier. For the first time it was read as serious literature and was considered to have predictive content. Consequently major publishers were drawn to this field and published not only new works but reprinted old novels and stories as well. Two new magazines, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1949) and *Galaxy* (1950) helped expand the following even more. Both the magazines contributed to changing the existing stereotypes and tended to lean towards a satirical interpretation of the classic sci-fi themes. The influence they exerted was as great as Campbell's had been a generation earlier, and like him, they established the major ideas of the coming decades. They were also equally responsible for legitimizing the genre as literature through their careful and selective breeding of writers. Among them was Alfred Bester who wrote ironic stories about malcontents in society and focused on the relationships between androids and their human owners. His novels *The Demolished Man* (1953) and *The Stars My Destination* (1960) are considered classics of their time. Other prominent writers to start their careers in the '50s sci-fi magazines were Brian Aldiss and J G Ballard. Aldiss's *Starship* (1958) revolutionized the concept of the spaceship as a world in itself, and Ballard explored the psychological significance of wrecked technology and empty landscapes.

Science fiction in the '90s is dominated by brilliant Michael Crichton, with books like *Jurassic Park*, *Congo*, *The Andromeda Strain* and *Sphere* to his credit. He expertly blends real science with fantasy to produce an original and remarkably engrossing style. Author of the first cyberpunk novel is William Gibson, the man who coined the term 'Cyberspace'. He was the first to introduce virtual reality and cyberspace to science fiction (both of which are now a reality) with his book *Neuromancer*. Another leading contemporary writer was the prolific Isaac Asimov. Till his death in 1992 he wrote at an amazing rate producing some of sci-fi's finest novels and short stories. The same can be said for his compatriot Arthur C Clarke. Living in Colombo, he now works on his own television show *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious Universe*. Very few writers have done so much for science fiction as they have. Their books held two generations captivated and will continue to do so for many more to come.

As we enter the 21st century, so many of the stories that were science fiction when they were written, have come true. In 1927 Wells envisioned the first men on the moon, in 1876 Verne wrote about the first



were joined in the '50s by Arthur C Clarke and Fredrik Pohl. During Campbell's editorship, from 1937 to 1950, much of the themes that have become synonymous with sci-fi were invented and explored for the first time: robots, alternate worlds, travel faster than the speed of light, alien encounters and the full consequences of nuclear power appeared for the first time. Science fiction's induction into the mainstream had a great deal to do with the

submarine and Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics have become the foundation for current robotic technological development. We continue to read sci-fi simply because we enjoy it, we enjoy going to other worlds and seeing wonders yet to come. So long as human imagination survives, science fiction will always take us back to the future.

Source: The Multimedia Encyclopaedia.

Sniper's Rose A Loose Shoe-Lace and Poor Helen

by Md Atiquzzaman

Gandhi). Shoma is dreadfully captivated by music. Music takes her to eternity.

The most dreaded period for her is the night. Essential of cosmopolitan life can do little for her to drive away the mystery, the loneliness, the engulfing depression which darkness brings along every night. Deep down inside, she can't help yearning for a companion ... not a friend not a boy friend ... all she wants is a person, an innocent one, a lucid one with no hypocrisy and with a lot of confidence. A person to be somewhere beside her or behind her to assure her about all the truths of life to make her enjoy even her bittered experience.

Each morning Shoma would dare to dream that, someone was there to fight the darkness. Was it the boy with the cute voice and excellent words or was it Auyon, the charming one. Utter confusion obstructs all her effort to personify a companion, and it is not a person she ultimately depends on. She is a lonely hawk gliding peacefully in the night sky, her ultimate companion.

History: Neither fast food, nor miniskirts make him drool. On his way home, every day from college, Auyon would reach Elephant Road and would walk aimlessly. He observes people with insatiable curiosity. People running after commodities, people buying the costlier ones boys taking drugs, children begging, ... and Auyon would wonder, it's a funny game that he plays, a game with a lot of contrasts,

variety. Auyon had been looking for an appropriate gift, and he had been looking for one since long.

What he himself has a vague idea of what it actually might be. He keeps on searching for a gift, for the single gift in many places ... Aarong, Gulshan, Eastern Plaza ... not for a perfume, he would love to use, not for a Revlon colorstay for his mother, he want's a priceless gift for ... Shoma.

She has her ways with boys. She can read a man, the way she can read herself ... confidently. She traces the Perth of his thoughts, his very own thoughts, with immaculate precision. Appears as if she had been tirelessly observing a man for years. Shoma compels Auyon to wonder & wonder & wonder ... & to love, not knowingly.

Auyon had been recalling and reversing his last conversation with her. He wants to remember each word she said ... each word. He asked, 'Any arrangement tomorrow?' 'No,' she replied simply, 'studying?'

'Trying to ... you?' 'Forced to ...' and they both smiled. Auyon could virtually see her smile over phone. He stocked a ton of courage' and said, 'haven't seen you since long ...'. 'You can come ... anytime, she answered slowly with distinct words. Auyon's, all courage expired with his last word, where? Shoma understood, she understood precisely: 'I have a few little cousins. You know they are so lovely and I adore them a lot; they'll be at my place tomorrow ... they'll stay all day, Auyon

heard her take a deep breath. She added 'I can't ... go out'.

Their story: The moment she was wondering about Auyon, he entered her apartment building. She had been expecting all day, and now it's almost evening. And she expected a call too ... from the boy with smart looks, enchanting voice and excellent rhetoric. He hasn't called too. Auyon took a quick glance on himself, standing in front of her door. Everything's OK including the gift in his hand except ... a loose shoe lace. But its no time to bend now, she is opening the door anytime.

And yes, she opened the door and he wished her and he handed her the gift and he looked into her eyes, and her eyes gleamed and before Auyon could say something more — the phone started to ring. A dulcet male voice, she heard.

You see Shoma, I was roaming around all day ... then I entered a florist and I asked for some flowers, some fresh flowers. They handed me a few roses and said, 'They are the most fresh of all, sir.' Well, how fresh they are? I asked; they answered, 'We picked them just this morning, sir, and you see the small one in the middle? She bloomed a few hours ago. Sir; Then, Shoma, I picked the little rose, the most beautiful rose in the world and I said 'Happy Birthday.' I have her with me. Won't you like to see her, won't you come, Shoma?'

Well, readers, this is the boy who changes Shoma's little world to a big amusement park. This is the voice that drives away all her depression. So, Shoma clutches the phone to hear more with her moist eyes set on the polite Auyon. And Shoma can't find a word to say, and can't find a decision to make.

The little wrapped packet lies on her lap, as if it has found the safest place. Auyon had seen a lot, heard a lot, loved a lot and still loves a lot. He loves those beggars, he loves those vendors on the streets, he loves the bus con-

ductor who saved his life once and whom he never met again, he loves his mother and he loves Shoma.

Somehow Auyon now realises that he has plenty of time to walk. From the back of his mind someone said, 'Go on boy, bend, and tighten your shoe lace and wipe your single teardrop, you're another lover who was not born in Troy'.

Shoma and Auyon never met again.

Quotations

Compiled by Paula Aziz

Men is born free, But everywhere he is in chains. — Jean Jacques

I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it — Voltaire

To be free is nothing, To become free is very Heaven. — Fichte

It is better to have loved and lost Than never to have loved at all. — Toneson

If you love something Set it free If it come backs it is yours If it doesn't It was never. — Anon

Sometimes you have to go a long way in order to come back in a short distance correctly. — John Keats

Adventure is a romantic name for trouble. — Anon

The function of freedom is to free someone else. — Anon

Dawn does not come twice to awaken a man. — Anon

To improve is to change. To be perfect is to change often. — Anon

Who needs enemies when we have politicians?

WHY blame outsiders, India or Pakistan? For wrongs done to the nation, now and long, forgotten Give me a million Farakkas and Razakars than this Who needs enemies when we have politicians? Why curse heaven when cyclones whip our coasts? Why worry when we get knee deep in water Better knee deep in water than knee deep in blood Who needs enemies when we have politicians? Why get scandalised when we get called inept? A nation gets the leaders it deserves But what have we done to deserve these clowns Who needs enemies when we have politicians? Why get red in the face when we are called by paleface Who needs a bunch of ignorant peacocks? How is our heritage, our art and culture helping us now Who needs enemies when we have politicians? How many does it take to hold 120 million hostage? And why do the 120 million quietly accept it? The solution to that shameful riddle is found right here Who needs enemies when we have politicians? Why blame the hoodlums for the crime on our streets? Who was it that gave them their guns? We are our own worst enemies, are we not? But ... Who needs enemies when we have politicians?

by Gilga Mesh