WRITTEN BY KEVIN OTT

# Beamed Up

## How *Star Trek* became Writers University

Space: It's really, really big.

No, seriously. The universe—our galaxy alone, even—is actually more incomprehensibly huge than you've probably imagined. Thick with suns and planets and exoplanets and nebulae and pulsars, the region beyond Earth's exosphere is a vast unyielding, unanswered, unanswerable question.

Statistically, more than 10,000 inhabited worlds hang inside the Milky Way's borders, which cover about 35 kiloparsecs from end to end. Ultra-deep-field telescopy reveals about a hundred billion more galaxies like ours.

That's a lot of story potential.

"There's always another planet," says David Gerrold. "There's probably half a billion planets in our galaxy alone. So there's no limit."

Gerrold is a *Star Trek* writer, among the original *Trek* writers, having written both "The Trouble With Tribbles" and "The Cloud Minders" episodes of the premiere series that ran from 1966 to 1969. He would go on to write for the short-lived *Trek* animated series and lay much of the groundwork for *Star Trek: The Next Generation* two decades later.

At the time, Gerrold had no idea of the titanic fiction engine he was helping to build.

"We didn't realize we'd be a cultural archetype," he says. "We just thought, eh, we'd be around a few years and then it would die away. That was what I figured. Because who knew from television phenomena lasting forever?"

*Forever* is not quite 50 years yet, but since those early days, *Star Trek* has become an empire. Spawning six television series, twice as many movies (the most recent, *Star Trek Into Darkness,* released May 16, 2013), and countless novels, comic books, and related materials, *Trek* has arguably generated more job opportunities for writers than any other television franchise in history.

The original 1966 series (referred to as *The Original Series* or *TOS*) had about 20 writers, many of whom went on to write for the animated series in the early '70s. *The Next Generation* (*TNG*) doubled that number in the late '80s, owing in part to its unique open-door script submission policy. More writers joined the staffs of the later series *Deep Space Nine* (*DS9*), *Voyager*, and *Enterprise*. Ultimately, throughout the years the franchise has provided shelter to more than 150 writers.

For Gerrold and many other working scribes, *Trek* was simply the first step in a long career. "Tribbles" became one of the most iconic episodes of the franchise, re-

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verberating into the animated series, *DS9,* and beyond. (A tribble is visible in a cage in the 2009 movie, and another tribble plays an important role in *Into Darkness.*) And his work on *Trek* earned him the attention he needed to get hired on additional science-fiction shows throughout the '70s, '80s, and '90s—*Land of the Lost, Tales From the Darkside,* and *Sliders,* among others. *Trek* has begun careers (Gerrold's, *Battlestar Galactic* creator Ron Moore), defined them (*TOS* maven D.C. Fontana; Nicholas Meyer, who co-scripted and directed movies *II, IV,* and *VI*), and even accented them (*Hugo* and *Skyfall* writer John Logan, who co-wrote 2002's *Nemesis*).

None of it would have happened if not for a confluence of serendipity that began with—really—Lucille Ball. After the wild success of *I Love Lucy,* Ball's production company, Desilu, was able to pitch *The Lucy Show,* a follow-up sitcom, to CBS. As part of the contract, Desilu had access to a $600,000 annual development fund. Without that money, *Trek* might have remained on the drawing board forever. No *Enterprise*. No Captain Kirk. No Captain Picard. No career starting points for countless writers throughout the following decades.

Ball not only accepted Roddenberry's pitch after others rejected it, she championed it. When NBC rejected "The Cage"—*Trek*'s first pilot—as too cerebral, Ball pushed execs to accept a do-over: a second pilot in the form of "Where No Man Has Gone Before," about a crew member who develops godlike powers. That second pilot reworked the show, introducing Mr. Spock's trademark stoicism while deleting other characters, including a second officer played by Roddenberry's future wife Majel Barrett.

There are a million parallel universes out there in the ether where *Trek* either doesn't exist or is completely different. Before

## A Brief of the Future: A Trek Primer

### 1966-1969: THE ORIGINAL SERIES

Pitched as "*Wagon Train* to the stars," Gene Roddenberry's first series details the exploratory deep-space mission of Captain James Tiberius Kirk; the Vulcan Mr. Spock; ship's doctor Leonard McCoy; and the crew of the Constitution-class starship *Enterprise,* the flagship of the peaceful United Federation of Planets' fleet. *TOS* introduces such alien races as the Klingons, the Romulans, and the Andorians as well as classic *Trek* concepts like warp drives, tribbles, and the Prime Directive.

### 1973-1974: THE ANIMATED SERIES

Roddenberry and D.C. Fontana produced 22 episodes of a half-hour animated series that continued to follow the *Enterprise* in its adventures.

### 1979: THE MOTION PICTURE

Now an admiral, Captain Kirk returns to space in a refitted *Enterprise* to investigate a mysterious cloud of energy approaching Earth. It would be the first of a dozen *Trek* feature films.

### 1982: THE WRATH OF KHAN

Lauded by critics and fans as the best *Trek* movie, *Wrath of Khan* revisits the *TOS* episode "Space Seed," which introduced Khan Noonien Singh, a genetically engineered warlord discovered cryogenically frozen in space. Khan wreaks vengeance on Kirk and the *Enterprise* crew for leaving him stranded on a deserted planet at the end of "Space Seed." *Wrath of Khan* features the infamous "KHAAAAAANNN!" scream by Kirk.

### 1984: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

Continuing where *Wrath of Khan* left off, *Search for Spock* details Kirk's and McCoy's efforts to return Spock's spirit to his body, while fighting hostile Klingons over the Genesis Device, a powerful and destructive terraforming tool. During the course of the movie —SPOILER ALERT!—the *Enterprise* is destroyed.

### 1986: THE VOYAGE HOME

Now without a ship, the crew of the *Enterprise* uses a stolen Klingon warship to travel back in time to the 1980s to fetch a humpback whale, the only mammal that can communicate with an alien probe threatening Earth. At the end, the crew is gifted with a new ship, the *Enterprise-A.*

### 1987-1994: THE NEXT GENERATION

The second live-action *Trek* series created a younger crop of fans. Set about a century after Kirk's time, *TNG* features another new *Enterprise* (the *Enterprise-D*), a new captain (Jean-Luc Picard), and a new crew, including a blind chief engineer with a bionic visor; an android; and the first Klingon to join Starfleet. The series also introduced alien races like the hive-minded Borg, the crafty and opportunistic Cardassians, and the avaricious Ferengi.

### 1989: THE FINAL FRONTIER

*Final Frontier* follows Kirk and the *Enterprise* crew as their ship is hijacked by a renegade Vulcan looking for God at the center of the universe. Features the now-classic line, "What does God need with a starship?"

### 1991: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

The last movie to focus on the *TOS* cast, *Undiscovered Country* explores the beginnings of diplomacy between the United Federation of Planets and the Klingons. An allegory for the end of the Cold War, the movie sees Kirk framed for the murder of a Klingon ambassador and sent to a frigid penal colony.

### 1993-1999: DEEP SPACE NINE

The fourth *Trek* series is set at the titular *Deep Space Nine,* a space station at the edge of an active wormhole. Over time, *DS9* develops a more biting political

pitching the series, Roddenberry had created and produced *The Lieutenant,* centering around a Marine (named William Tiberius Rice) living at Camp Pendelton. NBC cancelled the show because—according to Roddenberry—the Vietnam War made military dramas unpopular. Without that war, Roddenberry might never have switched from a more direct martial theme to the allegorical gunboat diplomacy of *Trek*. Even the details might have been different: Early drafts of the *Trek* pitch include Captain Robert April of the *USS Yorktown,* who patrols the stars with a red-skinned Burroughs-esque Martian named Spock. Even "The Cage" features neither Kirk nor April, instead starring Captain Chris Pike, whose appearance would be retconned in a later episode.

But it was the success or failure of those first few steps that meant all the difference to the history.

### Brannon Braga

"Maybe I wouldn't have had a career," says Brannon Braga, who began his with a college internship on *The Next Generation* and stayed with the franchise through the early 2000s. "It's hard to imagine, because I'm a decent writer, but I don't think I'd be anywhere close to where I am had I not worked on a show that required so much attention and excellence from all of its writers."

A severed head lurks on a shelf in Braga's office. You notice it when you sit down on the sofa since, in its plastic box, the

BRANNON BRAGA

head stares out at you. The head of a Borg, the hive-minded race of cyborgs that plagued the heroes of *TNG*. Think evangelists but with bionic implants and lots of black latex.

Braga started on *TNG* between the third and fourth seasons, when the Borg launched a major offensive on Starfleet and, in the show's defining moments, assimilated Captain Picard as one of their own. He would stay until the end and go on to helm both *Voyager* and *Enterprise*.

Braga probably couldn't have arrived at a more complicated time. He came on board not long after Michael Piller—who, along with Rick Berman, shepherded the franchise through the 1990s—started running the show. By the time Braga was hired, internal politics had decimated much of the staff. (Roddenberry, in declining health, was leaving most decisions to Berman and Piller.)

Some writers left the show with bad feelings. Gerrold, who'd been present since *TNG*'s inception, saw his relationship with Roddenberry almost irreparably damaged. But he stayed with *Trek* until the cancellation of *Enterprise*—the

edge than its predecessors, chronicling a costly war that leaves the Federation in disarray. The series introduces Captain Benjamin Sisko, the franchise's first African-American lead.

#### 1994: GENERATIONS

The first feature film to focus on the *TNG* cast, *Generations* also gives fans what they'd been longing for: a meeting between Captains Kirk and Picard. Beginning with the mysterious disappearance of Kirk aboard the *Enterprise-B,* the film continues with the *Enterprise-D* crew discovering him alive and well, trapped in a bizarre energy ribbon tearing through space. At the end of the movie, the *Enterprise-D* is destroyed.

#### 1995-2001: VOYAGER

Led by the first female captain in any *Trek* series, Captain Kathryn Janeway, the *Voyager* is flung 70,000 lightyears from Earth and stranded there. The series follows the crew as they try to make their way home, fighting the Borg and the xenophobic Species 8472 along the way.

#### 1996: FIRST CONTACT

Lauded as the best of the movies featuring the *TNG* cast, *First Contact* sees a new *Enterprise,* the *Enterprise-E,* chasing the Borg through time as the cybernetic race attempts to wipe out the Federation by changing its history. During the course of the film, the Borg infiltrate the *Enterprise,* and Captain Picard deals with the post-traumatic stress that lingers from their abduction of him during *TNG*'s third season.

#### 1998: INSURRECTION

The crew of the *Enterprise-E* protects a developing race from alien aggressors who negotiate backroom deals with Federation honchos. Picard and his crew defy the Federation in their efforts to protect the Ba'ku from the Son'a.

#### 2001-2005: ENTERPRISE

A prequel series, *Enterprise* takes place prior to the events of *TOS* and follows Captain Jonathan Archer as he commands an experimental ship called—you guessed it—the *Enterprise*. Remember this *Enterprise* chronologically predates every other *Enterprise* mentioned in this timeline. Except for the times Kirk's *Enterprise* went back in time, which was, unsurprisingly, often.

#### 2002: NEMESIS

Possibly the poorest-reviewed film in the *Trek* canon, *Nemesis* is notable for featuring a character who is born in an underground prison and claws his way to the top of a criminal empire. Despite being played by Tom Hardy, this character is not Bane, the Batman villain from *The Dark Knight Rises,* but is in fact an evil clone of Captain Picard.

#### 2009: STAR TREK

Writers Roberto Orci & Alex Kurtzman worked with producer Damon Lindelof and director J.J. Abrams to reboot the *Trek* franchise in a way that would leave its history intact. Their solution: an alternate timeline, spurred into existence by an aged Spock, who travels back in time to chase a renegade Romulan hell-bent on destroying his home planet.

#### 2013: STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS

The continuation of the alternate timeline features Benedict Cumberbatch as a villain determined to destroy Starfleet from the inside.

**Ron Moore's hire heralded an unusual policy: During much of its run, *TNG* accepted pitches and spec scripts from just about anybody. The show had readers on staff who did nothing but coverage. Moore remembers devoting a day a week to meeting with potential freelancers. Throughout the years, they developed the Great Wall of *Star Trek* Clichés, a catalog of plot elements repeated in specs: Time travel. Parallel universes. Data becomes a human. Data becomes a god. Someone else becomes a god.**

last *Trek* show ever to appear on television.

"I came in as an intern, and I left Paramount 17 years later as the last person on [*Enterprise*]," Braga says. "I shut off the lights, which I never would have predicted."

His work on *TNG, Voyager,* and *Enterprise* (as well as the movies *Generations* and *First Contact*) springboarded his television career; since then, he's worked on *24* and is currently executive producing *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey,* the continuation of the original Carl Sagan series.

But Gerrold admits to missing *Trek* terribly.

"I fell in love with *Star Trek*. I didn't really get it completely until I started working on it. And then it became part of my daily existence for a long, long time. I think I'm credited with well over 100 episodes. I probably wrote closer to 300. It's madness. And it never got old, and it never got boring, and it was never anything less than challenging, every single day. It was extraordinary. I mean, it's a great storytelling machine."

D.C. FONTANA

### D.C. Fontana

That machine has been in near-constant production throughout five decades. D.C. Fontana remembers joining as Gene Roddenberry's secretary. She'd been pitching and selling TV episodes since 1960, when Samuel Peeples (who would go on to write the *TOS* episode "Where No Man Has Gone Before") bought a story outline she wrote for an episode of *The Tall Man*.

Though *Trek* was Gene Roddenberry's baby, she says, a huge crowd of writers raised it because, unlike televised serial science fiction of the time, it was worth developing into something greater.

"[Roddenberry] created *Star Trek* by himself," Fontana says. "Certainly over the first year of production, people added elements. And the characters. Other people contributed bits and pieces to hone those characters, to grow those characters… A lot of people really, really went for it, simply because we were not playing down the science. We were not making kiddie stuff. This was hard science fiction. Nobody else was really doing the kind of science fiction we were."

In the beginning, the show's list of credited writers boasted the genre's masters: Harlan Ellison. Richard Matheson. Robert Bloch. Theodore Sturgeon.

"We chose in the early months of *Star Trek* to go with strong science fiction names," she says, "because we felt that would attract people to this show. Uh, it is science fiction. We're not fooling around here. So we did use a lot of writers who [were experiencing] their first time in television. But mostly they came through, and if you had to do a rewrite, you did a rewrite."

That strong foundation gave *Trek* powerful roots in science-fiction fandom, an audience that, until then, had been kept primarily on the edge of pop culture, mostly limited to pulp fiction and genre digests. The mutual attraction formed when writers who loved science fiction for its own sake began crafting stories in its purest form.

"[Producers] look at it as a vocabulary where you can just make shit up," Gerrold says. "Real science fiction is about who we are as human beings. What's it mean to be human? What's our place in the world? What's our place in the universe?"

That investment in hard science fiction is what attracted Ron Moore to *Trek*.

### Ron Moore

Although best known for creating 2004's acclaimed *Battlestar Galactica* reboot, Moore got his start on *TNG,* later honing his skills further on *DS9*. Where Braga describes himself as having been "more of a *Twilight Zone* dude," Moore was a *Trek* geek through and through. While a student at Cornell, he was notorious for an extensive collection of officially licensed *Star Trek* novels (even now, *Star Trek* "extended universe" novels are being written as quickly as fans can devour them).

Today, Moore occupies a small nautical-themed office in Pasadena—think Krakens and mizzen masts and topsail schooners—and is running a new show, *Helix,* for SyFy.

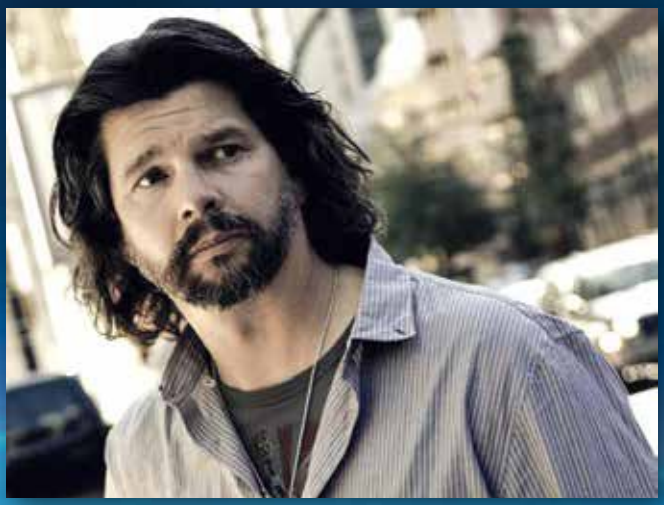
"I'm old enough to remember Neil Armstrong walking on the moon as an early childhood memory," he says. "I loved the space program, and I wrote letters to NASA and had pictures of spaceships I wanted to make. And then I

discovered science-fiction shows on television. *Lost in Space* was my first love. Sometime around the third or fourth grade, I discovered *Star Trek,* and that was my show from then on."

Though earlier writers like Fontana and Gerrold could submit script outlines and story ideas directly to Roddenberry (or *Trek*'s other big Gene, producer Gene L. Coon), by the mid-'80s that kind of submission practice was increasingly rare. When Moore learned about *TNG* from a trade magazine he'd purchased at a gas station near his apartment during the show's third season, he managed to get staffed with one spec and a tour of the production offices. The spec in question later became "The Bonding," the fifth episode of *TNG*'s third season.

Moore's triumph heralded an unusual policy: During much of its run, *TNG* accepted pitches and spec scripts from just about anybody. The show had staff readers who did nothing but coverage, and Moore remembers devoting a day a week to meeting with potential freelancers. Throughout the years, they developed the Great Wall of *Star Trek* Cliches, a catalog of plot elements they saw repeated in specs: Time travel. Parallel universes. Data becomes a human. Data becomes a god. Someone else becomes a god.

In her blog *Jane in Progress,* Jane Espenson (*Once Upon a Time, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) remembers noticing The



RONALD D. MOORE

Wall—essentially a big whiteboard—after an early pitch session with *TNG* producers. It was full of concepts like "The Egg" (a strange celestial object turns out to be . . . an egg!) and "Jack's Back" (a mysterious visitor to the ship turns out to be . . . Dr. Beverly Crusher's presumed-dead husband, Jack!).

"One hopeful writer had even combined these," she writes. "The egg is taken into the ship and it hatches, revealing Jack Crusher."

Ponder that: You work in a writers' room that accepts pitches from outside the staff. And you meet regularly with potential freelancers. Oh, and the show in question has one

of the broadest fandoms in the history of American pop culture, spawning billions of terabytes worth of fan fiction.

Being there wasn't easy, recalls Joe Menosky, who worked on staff for *TNG, DS9,* and *Voyager*.

"We spent too much of our time reading specs and taking pitch meetings," Menosky writes in an email exchange. "Michael [Piller] would say, 'Even if just one episode a season comes out of this process, that's one less we have to come up with on our own.' But he never considered the cost benefit of that process."

A talent like Moore would have made it anyway, he believes: "Ron is such a superior writer that even without the open door, he would have been quickly discovered, and because of his own love for *Trek* would have found his way to the franchise."

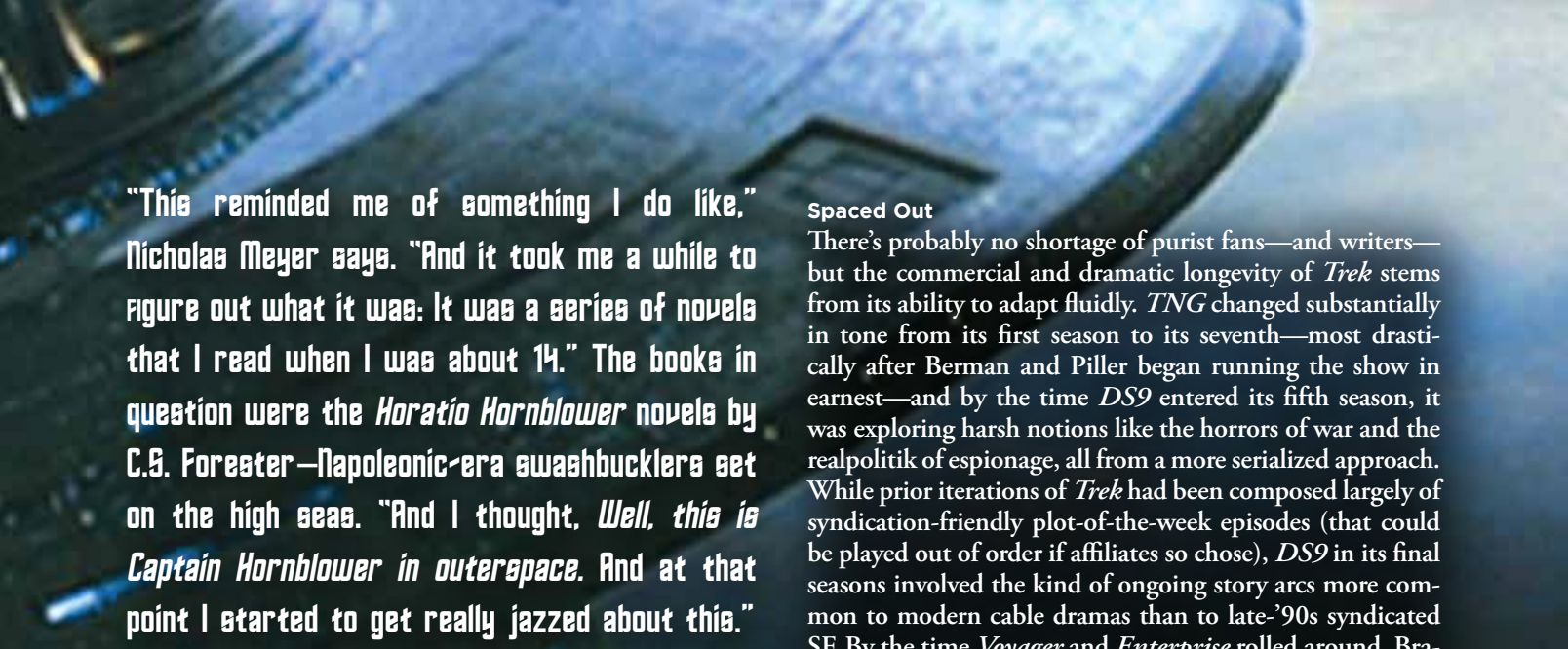
### Gene Roddenberry

However, there are a billion stories in the naked galaxy, and as a franchise gets older producers look for any way to keep it fresh. Which never became simple, especially given the narrative restraints placed on the franchise by Roddenberry himself. In *Fade In: From Idea to Final Draft,* his book about the writing process behind *Star Trek: Insurrection,* Piller wrote about "Roddenberry's Box," a set of parameters that kept writers from straying too far from the central tenets of the *Trek* universe: Humankind had ascended. The worlds of the United Federation of Planets have evolved beyond poverty, illness, inequality, or even conflict. Everything is more or less perfect.

"Gene didn't want conflict between our characters," Piller wrote. "'All the problems of the world have been solved,' Gene said. 'Earth is a paradise.' Now, go write drama."

That was the dark side of Gene Roddenberry's utopian society. Think of it as the Law of Conservation of Conflict: Any conflict you keep out of your scripts has to go somewhere, and it usually ends up in the writers' room. Piller goes on to say he appreciated having firm guidelines in place; he felt it made his writing stronger. But not everyone agreed.

"I didn't have many direct conflicts with Gene, fortu-



"This reminded me of something I do like," Nicholas Meyer says. "And it took me a while to figure out what it was: It was a series of novels that I read when I was about 14." The books in question were the *Horatio Hornblower* novels by C.S. Forester—Napoleonic-era swashbucklers set on the high seas. "And I thought, *Well, this is Captain Hornblower in outerspace.* And at that point I started to get really jazzed about this."

nately," says Moore. "I did have *one*."

In an episode scripted by Moore, Captain Picard visits his estranged brother on Earth. Over the course of the story, the bitterness between the Picards becomes more and more pronounced, until they end up wrestling on the ground of the family vineyard.

"Gene didn't like it," says Moore. "And we had this meeting, with Gene and Rick [Berman] and Mike and me. And Gene was saying, flat out, this would not happen in this 24th-century vision. These two brothers must have had terrible parents. He didn't buy the fight, and he didn't like the conflict, and he thought it said bad things about Picard, and he didn't want it. And I was really kind of shellshocked. Because he was the Great Bird of the Galaxy, and I was the most junior member of the staff." In the end, Berman and Piller persuaded Roddenberry to let the episode unfold as Moore had written it.

Braga, on the other hand, didn't feel particularly constrained: "I've written on numerous other shows. And it's been a blast, but I'm just telling you: Nothing ever compares to *Star Trek*. And I don't think anything ever will, in terms of just being able to imagine anything you can possibly imagine and finding a way to do it. Anything. There's no other show like it. I did *24* for a couple of seasons, and it was a blast. But it's not *Star Trek,* man. We were working with some narrow story parameters. There are no parameters with *Star Trek*."

Despite it all, Roddenberry couldn't stop the changes that came to *Trek*. As the franchise evolved, it retained its strong science-fiction roots. There's no shortage of episodes about unknowable alien intelligences, the impacts of advanced technology, the essence of who we are as humans—but conflicts among characters became more pronounced even as the ensemble crews grew into more cohesive units. Today, it's hard to deny that *TNG* has one of the most iconic casts in television history, and episode after episode of every show proves that the success of humanity's future rests largely on the ability of Federation citizens and Starfleet officers to conquer interpersonal and political conflicts—not simply avoid them entirely.

### Spaced Out

There's probably no shortage of purist fans—and writers—but the commercial and dramatic longevity of *Trek* stems from its ability to adapt fluidly. *TNG* changed substantially in tone from its first season to its seventh—most drastically after Berman and Piller began running the show in earnest—and by the time *DS9* entered its fifth season, it was exploring harsh notions like the horrors of war and the realpolitik of espionage, all from a more serialized approach. While prior iterations of *Trek* had been composed largely of syndication-friendly plot-of-the-week episodes (that could be played out of order if affiliates so chose), *DS9* in its final seasons involved the kind of ongoing story arcs more common to modern cable dramas than to late-'90s syndicated SF. By the time *Voyager* and *Enterprise* rolled around, Braga had introduced hyperevolved extradimensional Lovecraftian aliens (*Voyager*'s clinically named Species 8472) and homages to John Carpenter's *The Thing* (the *Enterprise* episode "Regeneration").

But the changes started long before *Trek* returned to television. Though he didn't accept a writing credit, Nicholas Meyer chose with the 1982 feature *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* to keep many of the science-fiction elements from prior drafts (credited to Jack Sowards, Harve Bennett, and Sam Peeples), but focus more strongly on the adventurous aspects of the show, as well as on the bonds between the characters. When producer Harve Bennett approached him to work on the *Trek* films, Meyer wasn't exactly an expert or a fan; his experience with *TOS* amounted to a college roommate who watched the show during acid trips. So he checked out a few episodes.

"This reminded me of something I do like," he says. "And it took me a while to figure out what it was: It was a series of novels that I read when I was about 14." The books in question were the *Horatio Hornblower* novels by C.S. Forester—Napoleonic-era swashbucklers set on the high seas. "And I thought, *Well, this is Captain Hornblower in outerspace.* And at that point I started to get really jazzed about this.

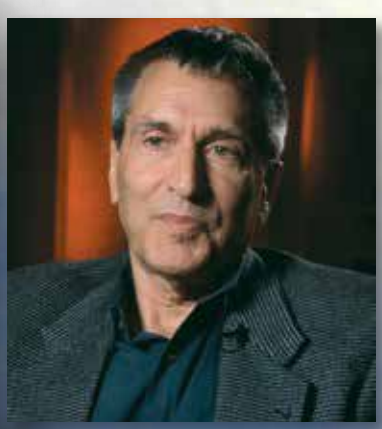
As *Trek* films go, *Wrath of Khan* is a fan favorite, along with the fourth and sixth movies (*The Voyage Home* and *The Undiscovered Country,* respectively). All three were directed, and scripted in part, by Meyer. And all three focus strongly on the long-term character relationships, particularly between Kirk and Spock.

"I was trying to translate *Star Trek* into something that I could understand," Meyer says. "And I don't believe that artists are the best or definitive judges of their own work… but it is my observation, for what it's worth, that *II, IV* and *VI*— my *Star Treks*—are the most earthbound."

It might have been Meyer, a self-admitted outsider, who shifted the tone of the franchise most dramatically. He bridled at the sterility of Roddenberry's future, with its lack of bathrooms or cigarette breaks. He unsuccessfully tried to post a NO SMOKING ON THE BRIDGE sign in the *Enterprise*. He did

succeed in changing the crew's uniforms from what he termed "Dr. Dentons" to a more nautical aesthetic. He is also responsible for Captain Kirk—the heraldic emblem of Starfleet, the Federation, and Roddenberry's dream of a post-scarcity Eden—shouting the phrase "double dumbass on you!"

Today, *Trek* might be in the midst of its greatest period of change, with new actors playing old characters in 2009's *Star Trek* and this year's *Star Trek Into Darkness*. Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman, who wrote the 2009 feature, knew their greatest challenge would be to refresh the series in a way that would create new fans without alienating old ones and without cheapening *Trek*'s legacy. Along with Damon Lindelof (a producer on the 2009 film and a co-writer on *Into Darkness*) and director J.J. Abrams, the pair opted to use time travel to create a parallel timeline within the *Trek* universe—at once preserving the existing canon and creating a new sandbox to play in without fear of fan reprisal.



NICHOLAS MEYER

## RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

So, the future: It's here, right?

Anyone who watched *Star Trek* in the '60s and lived until about the late-'90s knew that *Trek* writers pretty much invented the flip phone. Samsung never made anything as cool as Captain Kirk's communicator though. Of course, that wasn't the only thing the writers predicted. And communications design wasn't the only thing they influenced. Technology, culture, politics—it's too much for one sidebar. But let's give it a crack.

**iPADS.** There was a scene in just about every episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in which one character would hand another a flat, hard-plastic device with an embedded screen. *Trek* geeks knew these as PADDs, or Personal Access Display Devices, and characters used them for everything from duty rosters to diagnostic reports. They were pretty much iPads. The 1987 version of 24th-century iPads, but iPads nonetheless. The hilarious part: Capt. Picard would often have them stacked on his desk five high, indicating a hard day's work.

**MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY.** A company called Scanadu has released what can be described best as a real-life version of the medical tricorders carried by Starfleet doctors. Just place the sensor on your left temple and in 30 seconds the device reads your heart rate, temperature, electrical heart activity, blood oxygenation, and more and then sends that information to your phone. Not included: The holographic doctor from *Voyager*.

**THE BIG BANG THEORY.** Every episode of this show is chockablock with *Trek* references. *Next Generation* stars Wil Wheaton and Brent Spiner play themselves. If not for *Star Trek*, this show might not exist.

**THE KLINGON LANGUAGE INSTITUTE.** Elvish comes and Dothraki goes, but only Klingon has a *Hamlet* translation. Developed in the early 1980s by American linguist Marc Okrand for the franchise's feature films, the language of *Trek*'s most aggressive race is one of the three most widely spoken constructed languages. Today, the KLI, according to its mission statement, "continues its mission of bringing together individuals interested in the study of Klingon linguistics and culture, and providing a forum for discussion and the exchange of ideas." To those interested in pursuing the conjugation of Klingon verbs: *Qapla!* That means *success!* No, really.

—KO

**"When you're making these kinds of movies, we do feel a tremendous obligation to protect the things that were meaningful to us in our childhood and the experiences that we had," says Alex Kurtzman. "And certainly now as a parent I feel a responsibility to do that for my son, and for our kids in general. The world is a complicated place that they're growing up in now, and sometimes these stories help keep these things simple, strangely. *Trek* has been born and reborn so many times because it speaks to such universal themes, and we certainly felt a tremendous responsibility."**

Initially, they weren't even sure they wanted to do it, so terrified were they of screwing it up. But their greater fear was of someone else screwing it up.

"After eight months of sitting around looking at each other, we came up with an idea," Orci says. "We thought, *If you're gonna do it, this is probably the only way we can imagine doing it. It would be irresponsible not to try and do it because we don't want someone else to come in and do something worse.* When we had the right idea, then it wasn't daunting. It was like: It's our duty to try, even if we die trying."

Like Moore, Orci is a Trekker from way back. When he was young, he would watch episodes with an uncle on his mother's side and has always associated *Trek* with "warm fuzzy things and Christmas."

"The original series is very much a warm fire for me," he acknowledges.

ROBERTO ORCI & ALEX KURTZMAN

As far as many *Trek* writers are concerned, the series isn't just fun tentpole entertainment; the genuine drama is that it has survived and even thrived in the face of harsh cultural criticism. After decades of mockery—hell, even Shatner told Trekkers to get a life—we now live in a world where *The Big Bang Theory* is as much about loving geekdom as it is about lampooning it. To the *Trek* writers who grew up as fans, it's about time all those years of keeping up with the Cardassians paid off.

### Damon Lindelof

Visit Damon Lindelof's office and you'll wonder if there's any *Star Wars* memorabilia he doesn't have. Action figures, posters, and other memorabilia litter the place like Navajo blankets at a Route 66 rest stop. But despite the Wampa-skin rug and the *Revenge of the Jedi* poster, these days his stronger emotional connection is to *Trek*. ("I feel like *Star Wars* is my biological parent and *Trek* is my adoptive parent.")

Regardless of hierarchy, Lindelof wears his geekdom all on his sleeve.

"I've written my share of fan fiction over the years," Lindelof says. "Now I get to write fan fiction that's actually going to get made. And I think that's the way that Bob and Alex and I, and J.J. and [executive producer] Brian [Burk] all looked at *Trek,* which is: This is our fan fic, and everyone's gonna get to watch it."

But Lindelof too, thanks in part to Orci, understood the importance of preserving what came before.

"Bob, who is 10 times the *Trek* aficionado that I will ever be—just kind of chapter and verse, all the original series, all of *Voyager,* all of *Enterprise,* all the novels—just, you know, deep. He was like, the issue with the reboot is: We can't say that none of that stuff ever happened. We can't just erase it. But how do we thread that needle between making it accessible to someone who thinks that *Star Trek* is not for them, and also honor and not erase the 40 years of canon?"

It's not as easy as with some other properties, he realizes; *Trek* started out in 1966 and, time loops and alternate universes notwithstanding, has been following roughly the same continuity ever since. So they weren't adapting anything; they were continuing a story.

"Christopher Nolan can just say the Tim Burton *Batman* movies never happened—they never existed," Lindelof says. "We felt like we owed the *Trek*-verse and the fans better than a straight-up reboot. So that was the challenge." (Going a step further, Orci and Kurtzman wrote a four-issue comic series that tied the 2009 movie to the existing universe.)

But unlike many of their predecessors, Orci, Kurtzman, and Lindelof weren't new writers when they scored the *Trek* gigs. Orci and Kurtzman have multiple tentpole credits and have worked on several franchises that predate their professional *Trek* careers (*Zorro, Transformers,*

DAMON LINDELOF

the current *Spider-Man* film series), and Lindelof is best known for writing *Lost*. They had the unique challenge of dealing with public perceptions. Whereas guys like Gerrold, Braga, and Moore were cutting their teeth as baby drama writers with episodes about appeasing the Romulan Empire and deionizing the quantum flux inhibitors, Orci, Kurtzman, and Lindelof had to develop a whole other skill set: managing expectations in the face of a notoriously obsessive fanbase.

"If I were reading that I took over *Star Trek*, how would I feel about that?" Lindelof asks. "And I'm able to acknowledge that some people aren't gonna be happy about it. Because there's always this 'who are you to do this?' that you have to acknowledge. But at the end of the day, I guess what we felt was: *Well, if we aren't gonna do* Trek, *no one was gonna do it.* It was gonna just sit in the closet, and there wasn't gonna be any *Trek*. Because at that point, *Enterprise* had been cancelled. And I think it was the first time since *TNG* went on that there was no *Trek* on the airwaves—no new *Trek* being made, television-wise or movie-wise."

According to Kurtzman, each became their own fiercest watchdogs: "When you're making these kinds of movies, we do feel a tremendous obligation to protect the things that were meaningful to us in our childhood and the experiences that we had. And certainly now as a parent I feel a responsibility to do that for my son as well, and for our kids in general. The world is a complicated place that they're growing up in now, and sometimes these stories help keep these things simple, strangely. *Trek* has been born and reborn so many times because it speaks to such universal themes, and we certainly felt a tremendous responsibility. If we were gonna carry that torch, we'd need to really, really dig in and make it a success on every level and make it as good as we knew how to make it. Because ultimately in 40 years someone else is gonna come along and do it too."

Orci agrees: "We just feel it was a cultural treasure and that we were entrusted to watch it for a while."

### Engage

In 2016, *Star Trek* will be half a century old. It'll be one of the oldest continuing narratives in American pop culture. It's employed dozens and dozens of writers throughout the decades. And it's left a mark on all of them.

"It's a little like being one of the craftsmen on a medieval cathedral that takes generations to build," says Menosky. "It's humbling but also exalting. Sort of like: 'I'm not the architect, and I didn't even work on the altar piece—but see that gargoyle over there? That's *mine*.'"

Braga often felt the same way during his *Trek* career, but one of his crowning moments came after being in a theater watching *First Contact,* the feature he co-wrote with Berman and Moore.

"I was proud to walk out and hear the girlfriend of some guy raving about the movie. And him saying, 'See? I told you!' Someone had discovered *Star Trek*. And that movie was partly created to say, 'Here's what it is; here's what *Star Trek* means.'"

Despite the changes from those first episodes—despite the slam-bang nature of the more recent movies, the grit and brutality of *DS9*'s Dominion War, the interpersonal and internecine drama that characterized the shows after Roddenberry's death—his dream still pulses along at warp nine.

"It's still cool to hope for stuff," Lindelof says. "I don't always have to say the worst is ahead of me, to manage my expectation. So when I think of *Trek* at its best, I always connect it with endings of episodes where the *Enterprise* has literally defied death for the millionth time, and Picard is smiling like the cat who ate the canary, and he turns to Riker, cracks a joke, and says, 'Engage.' That idea of fundamental optimism—that's pure Gene. That idea is what I think of when I think of *Trek*."

Dramatically, who could ask for more fertile ground than a galaxy full of planets to explore?

"There was a lot of potential for story, always," says D.C. Fontana. "Whether it was on a different planet, or one we already knew or thought we knew… Where are we in space? Where are we in this Federation of Planets? Do [our allies] still trust us? Do they still like us? Are they going to turn on us for some slight, perhaps? Or some injury that maybe we weren't responsible for?

"So you always have a story," she marvels. "You always have a story." WB